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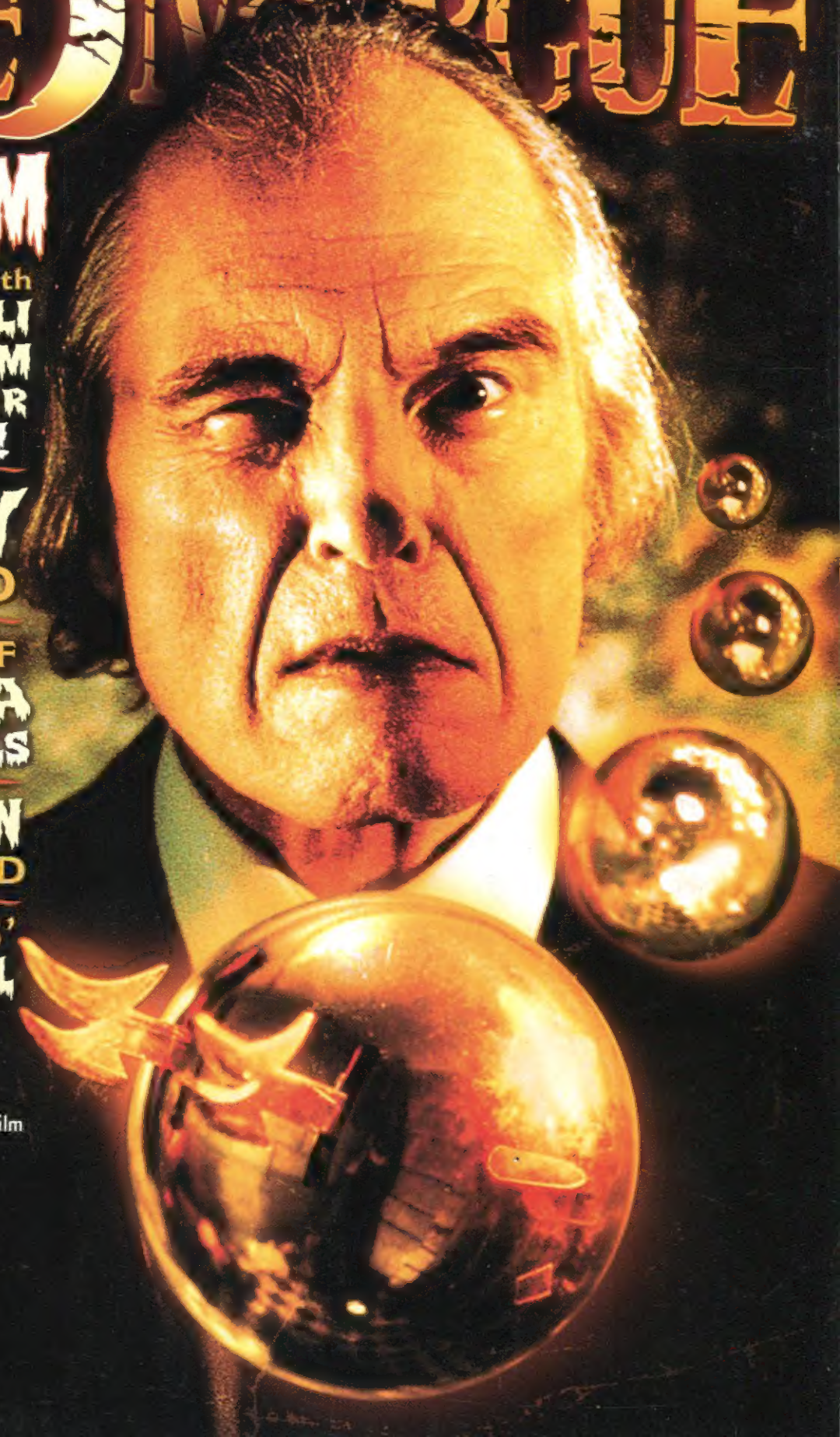
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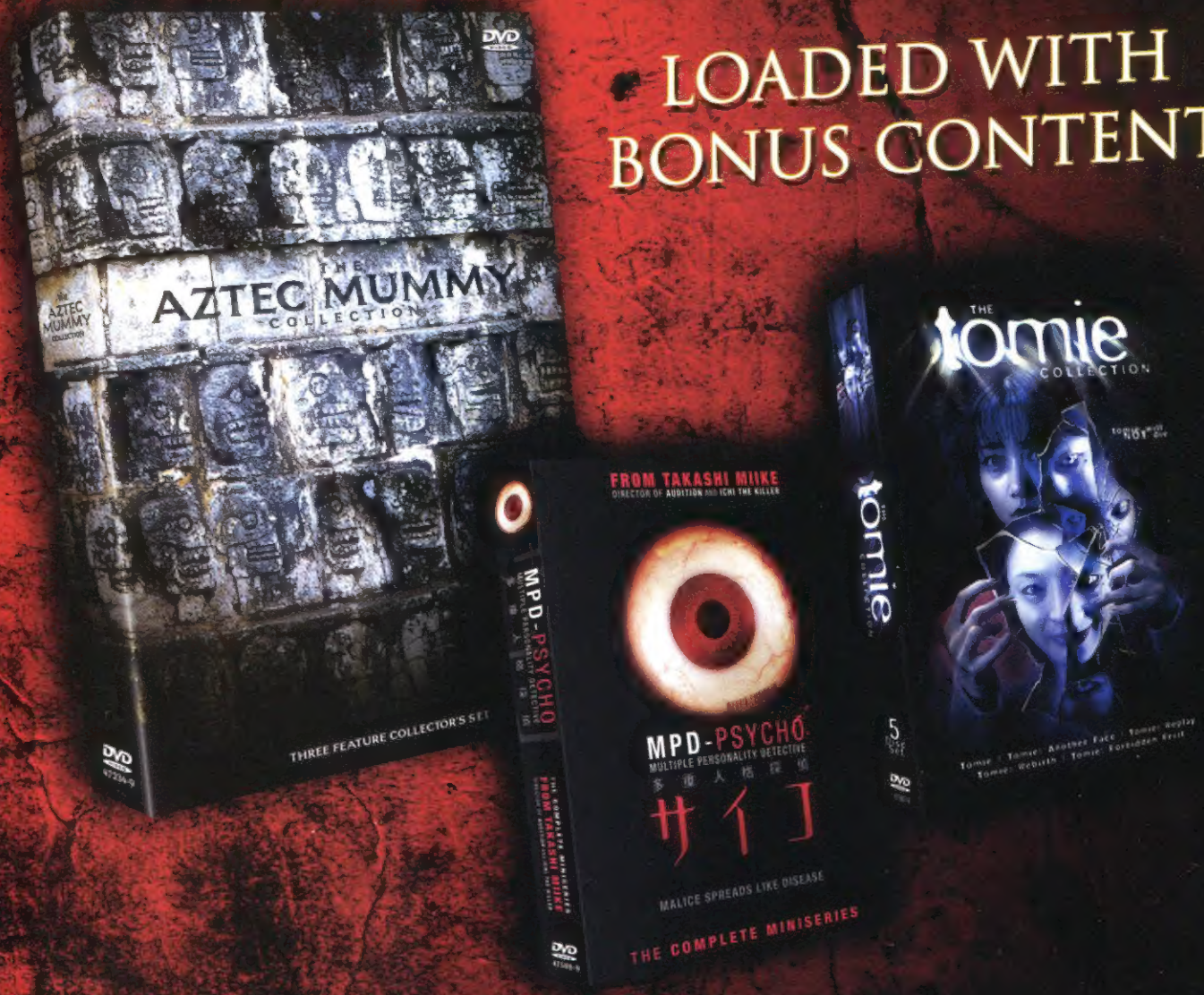
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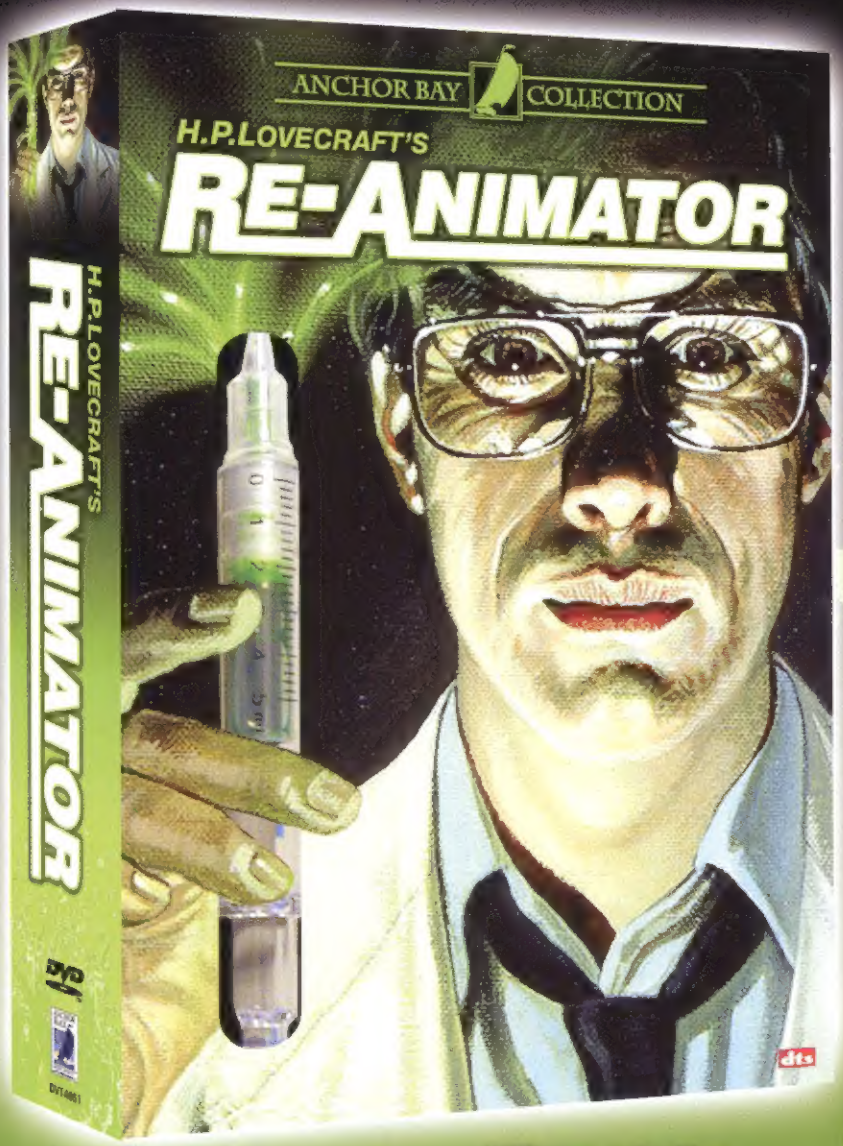
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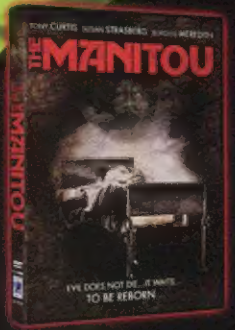
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

March 2007 Issue #65

Note From Underground



I have a lot of nightmares. I've been plagued by them since I was a little girl. Some are so vivid, visceral and terrifying that I wake up nearly paralyzed with fear, covered in cold sweat, trembling like someone who's about to have her head cut off, still aware of the faint scent of my own spilled blood. I've even found myself running around the house at 4 a.m. checking doors, making sure the windows are locked and testing the motion sensor in the hallway.

The jury's still out on what function nightmares serve. In the past, the "night-mare" was thought of as an illness: *The Household Cyclopedia* (1881) states these "unnatural physiologic events" were caused by bad wine, greasy meats and pastries, going to bed before the usual hour and sleeping too much, or not enough. Of course, this was also a time when excessive bloodletting and the ingestion of poisonous heavy metal salts were encouraged as treatments for common illnesses. Going even further back, the parasomnias (sleep disorders such as night terrors and sleepwalking) were gravely misunderstood, considered to be caused by the devil or molesting incubi.

We still speculate today. Some believe nightmares are our subconscious speaking to us through shocking images and bewildering scenarios; some say they're the result of certain drugs and medications, a traumatic event, stress, pregnancy, surgery, and so on; while others qualify these nocturnal episodes of fright as the random firing of neurons in the brain.

Whatever their cause and purpose, frightening dreams of all kinds come to us all (for compelling proof, visit nightmareproject.com, a searchable index of over 1800 nightmares input by users). As such, humans have developed techniques to reduce the distress these alarming mind adventures cause by writing them down, drawing or painting them, composing music and, of course, using them as jumping-off points to make movies. To that end, it's no coincidence the word "nightmare" appears so often in the horror genre. Many horror films have the quality of nightmares. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is an early example, with its distorted dream logic sets and a character with a sleep disorder. These films also typically feature a nightmare figure, a boogeyman of some sort (real or supernatural) giving chase – a common dream theme and now a hallmark of the genre, as is the case with Don Coscarelli's *Phantasm* and its iconic Tall Man.

According to Coscarelli, *Phantasm*'s genesis can be traced directly to a childhood nightmare in which he was pursued down unending corridors by a silver sentinel from which he could not escape. His fascination with the persistent memory of the nightmare led him to take his film one step further by making its ending ambiguous, leaving us to wonder if the entire thing was one long, troubled dream. Indeed, the movie plays out like one, with its relentless boogeyman, bizarre plot points and dizzying links to them.

There is a distinction between horror movies inspired by nightmares and horror movies that play out like nightmares, though. "Nightmare films," with their strange logic and style, belong to an approach to filmmaking that is governed by a movie's ability to make anything unnerving through mood and atmosphere. Case in point: David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, which succeeds at using simple pencil erasers to invoke intense feelings of dread. *Videodrome*, Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr*, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, *Carnival of Souls* and *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* all fall into this category. They demand to be experienced rather than watched, like taking part in a waking nightmare.

For me, nightmares encourage self-investigation, a journey into the darkest recesses of the human psyche, where real fears exist. It's here, in the shadowy labyrinth of the mind, that we find lurking the wrong turns, plane crashes, tunnels to nowhere, falling skies, homicidal maniacs, intruders, things at the doorstep, monsters, demons and, most frightening, the dark side of ourselves. I cannot disregard the dark inside me, nor can I resist exploring that darkness to achieve a better understanding of who, or what, I am.

So be it. Bring on the nightmares.

JV

jovanka@rue-morgue.com

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

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COVER: PHANTASM
DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

I CAN'T SAY HOW PLEASED I WAS to see your recent coverage of Korean movies. I've been really inspired by a number of their movies the last few years: *A Tale of Two Sisters*, *Memento Mori*, *R-Point*, etc., and I'm looking forward to seeing *The Host*. I was surprised to see no mention of Yoon-Hyun Chang's grisly serial killer film *Tell Me Something*, though. Wonderfully dark and twisty with lots of very effective grue.

David Schmidt – address withheld

THE ARTICLE [ON SILENT FILMS] in *RM#64* by Jason Lapeyre was really exceptional. *Caligari* and *Nosferatu* are fabulous films, and I always enjoy reading insightful opinions about them. I first really discovered Lon Chaney while reading David Skal's *The Monster Show*. In it, Skal also discusses parallels between Chaney's makeup effects and the horrible mutilations displayed by many veterans of the First World War. Talk about horror!

Corey Armstrong – Lebanon, New Hampshire

I JUST RECEIVED *RM#64* and went directly to "R.I.P. 2006: The Year in Review." I was really shocked to find that *Slither* was voted for best feature film. I just don't understand the concept of horror-comedy at all. The reason horror fans watch straight-ahead horror films is for the adrenaline rush. We don't watch these films to laugh and feel good. I'm so glad that the horror community didn't support *Slither*. I hate these films so much that I'd rather watch a regular comedy over that garbage. At least *TCM: The Beginning*, *Saw 3* and *Hostel* delivered the bloodsoaked goods – that's the way horror should be.

Mike Moyle – Bolton, Ontario

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU and the people on your message board for voting *Slither* the best picture of 2006. I met James Gunn and the cast of this wonderful movie at the Fangoria Weekend of Horrors in Chicago last March. They were very proud of their work and seemed to enjoy the genre as well. Sadly, however, audiences weren't as enthused, as this film flopped at the box office. It's sad when pieces of crap like *The Wicker Man* and *The Omen* remakes make more money than a good film like *Slither*. I only hope that it will find its audience on DVD. This is a film that is made by fans for fans.

Adam P. Koetters – Quincy, Illinois

I WAS ON THE VERGE of buying a subscription to *Rue Morgue*, but you have, with a single word, put the wallet back in my pocket. While reviewing *Perfume* in *RM#64*, Rodrigo Gudiño called *28 Days Later* "disappointing." Disappointing? Boyle's film is my all-time favourite movie. And I am a horror snob. It has a bittersweet soundtrack, a wealth of symbolism, imagery that is both haunting and terrifying and a true apocalyptic hero transformation. It is head and shoulders a better movie than *The Hills Have Eyes*, which, while entertaining enough, still felt like a Rob Zombie rip-off. Please tell me that it isn't the opinion of your entire staff that *28 Days Later* is "disappointing," or I'll have to rip your arms off and beat you with them.

Corina Cook – Nazareth, Pennsylvania

As part of our commitment to never censor our writers, we must understand and accept that everyone is entitled to their opinion. Though we may not always agree with each other, you cannot hold the opinion of one writer against Rue Morgue *as a whole. The magazine is the summation of the voices of dozens of people. If we all agreed on everything, our publication would be pretty boring and pointless. – Ed.*

I MUST TELL YOU, at first I wasn't a big fan of my son reading your magazine. I guess I come from a time when horror wasn't as acceptable as it has become nowadays. I still refuse to see *The Exorcist*, as I can remember my friends at school telling me how scary it was. But my son is a horror fan and I have come to live with that. I used to read the back of his music albums looking for cursing and satanic messages, but gave that up as I must admit that I was misinformed about the type of music he was listening to. I think it was a knee-jerk reaction that a lot of parents had to the heavy metal music scene. But just before Christmas, I did pick up a copy of your magazine that he had left out and decided that I had better have a look through it to see what he was reading. The cover had a ghoulie on it from a scary movie and there were pictures of people with blood on them and such. I didn't think I would look any further but then I read on and saw that you people were reviewing movies, books, music, comics, just about everything. I don't know what I expected but I sure didn't expect all of that. But without knowing it – you people made me a hero at Christmas. In your reviews of games, I was happy to see that you were not only reviewing video games but were covering card games and board games too. I can remember my family gathering around to play *Monopoly* and *Clue* when I was a kid, and even playing board games with my son when he was younger and video games were not so readily available. You featured a game called *Betrayal at House on the Hill* which I decided to order and give to my son for Christmas. When he opened that box he was like a little kid again. He was so happy that we played it together that night. Who knows, maybe one day we'll watch *The Exorcist* together. Keep up the good work and God bless.

Teresa Vinsen – Sanborn, New York

JUST RECEIVED DECEMBER'S ISSUE and saw in the letters column that you requested feedback on whether or not there should be more Festival of Fear coverage in *Rue Morgue*. I, for one, would welcome it. I'm sure I'm in the minority (about not owning a personal computer, that is) but *Rue Morgue* should not assume that all of its readers have access to your website where they can read about the Festival of Fear. The other problem with not having access to the website is that I miss all the great contests I remember you having. If you're thinking that I could easily solve these dilemmas by purchasing a computer, you're right, but until I do I feel I'm missing out on something. And when it comes to *Rue Morgue*, I don't wanna miss out on nothin'.

Greg Reiser – Ottawa, Ontario

THANK YOU for the terrific article on the original *Black Christmas*. While the remake looks less than enticing, hopefully it will serve to elevate the visibility of Bob Clark's masterpiece. Your article provided a well-needed clarion call for the masses to discover and rediscover this amazing film.

Aaron "Dr. AC" Christensen – Chicago, Illinois

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

Controversial serial killer film held up due to trial concerns

A new film based on the crimes of alleged Canadian serial killer Robert Pickton has been postponed indefinitely amidst concerns about how it could effect the impartiality of the jury in Pickton's ongoing trial. Shot in 2005 as part of a series of serial killer films by Germany's Ulli Lommel, *Killer Pickton* has also raised the ire of groups concerned with the emotional well-being of the victims' families.

"I've gotten some really bad, angry press about *Killer Pickton*," says co-writer/director Lommel, who is best known for his 1981 horror film *The Boogeyman* and his work with art house auteur Rainer Werner Fassbinder. "The movie was meant to be released last October, but we agreed to hold it until the trial is finished. I decided it was the right thing to do. I never wanted to hurt anybody. To tell you the truth, I thought the case was closed."



In fact, Pickton's trial only began this past January, and according to British Columbia Justice James Williams, it may take upwards of twelve months to play out. This has made the general release of Lommel's film a touchy issue, as some believe it could influence the jury, resulting in a mistrial.

Killer Pickton is part of a series of low-budget, shot-on-DV serial killer pictures that Lionsgate commissioned Lommel to make back in 2004. Other films in the series include *BTK Killer*, *Green River Killer* and *The Zodiac Killer*.

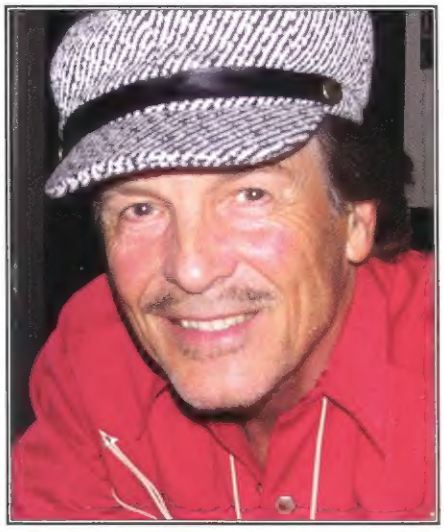
The film's subject, a Port Coquitlam, BC pig farmer who is charged with 26 counts of first-degree murder, allegedly preyed primarily on drug-addicted, downtown Vancouver prostitutes. According to many reports, it is believed that in addition to murdering and dismembering his victims, Pickton fed their remains to his porcine livestock, in turn contaminating the resulting meat products with human flesh.

"I made the movie because the facts I had read fascinated me," explains Lommel, who is adamant that the final cut of *Killer Pickton* won't be made until the trial reaches its conclusion. "I have no desire to effect the trial at all. If Pickton's found guilty ... then I'll insert that into the film. If not, then I'll have to take another look at it entirely. But I want to make it clear that this film is *not* a documentary. I have changed many details and even changed the victims' names."

Normally, such a direct-to-video exploitation picture would go unnoticed, but *Killer Pickton* has generated outrage from some of the victims' families, as well as the 15th Annual Women's Memorial March Planning Committee, a Vancouver-based group who launched an online petition calling for a boycott of the movie and urging distributors not to release it in Canada. As of press time, the petition had 1240 signatures.

The argument is an ancient one – should an artist bear any onus of social responsibility when creating a film that may very well deter the healing process of so many broken lives? Lommel doesn't think so.

"Social responsibility rests with the politicians, the teachers, the fathers and mothers who nurture and teach their children," he says. "But in art anything goes … it can be as irresponsible as possible, go as far as the artist wants it to go, and it owes nothing to no one but its creator. ... I also want to make it clear that I am not a misogynist, I've made enough films with strong female characters to prove that. I make my serial killer movies from the serial killer's point of view and if their victims were women, then I'll show that graphically. In my movies, violence is always depicted as horrible and unappealing as it is in real life."



Director Ulli Lommel.

Just as the outcome of the Robert Pickton trial remains unknown, so does the hope that audiences will be able to see Lommel's film any time soon. Still, the prolific filmmaker has no plans to slow down. Lommel was recently in Toronto scouting locations for his next feature, *Dante's Inferno*, which he describes as *his* version of Dante's tale, one which Lommel says will be, "really, really crazy."

Chris Alexander and **Monica S. Kuebler**



Edward Scissorhands story expanded in stage adaptation

"It takes some getting used to, this dancing with scissors on your hands," marvels Richard Winsor. The ballet, music and drama school graduate co-stars in a quasi-ballet stage translation of Tim Burton's 1990 cult classic *Edward Scissorhands* as half man, half gardening tool.

The soft-spoken Winsor, performing as the title character in director Matthew Bourne's *Scissorhands* adaptation (which plays at Toronto's Hummingbird Centre for the Performing Arts from April 4-7), seems game but somewhat nonplussed at the unusual physical requirements expected of the classically trained actor and dancer.



Edward Scissorhands: *The adaptation of Tim Burton's film comes to Toronto.*

"You have this disability of [a] leather-bound suit and hands, and you have to keep the posture and walking style that hinders playing through it," explains the British-born thespian, who alternates performances with Sam Archer. "In the film, the camera could catch Edward's every gesture, including close-ups to his eyes, the way he was feeling, but onstage you don't have that luxury. You posture and walk bigger, and in turn that feels unreal. Somehow you have to find the inner truth in the portrayal."

Winsor had his work cut out for him. This version of *Edward* is told without speaking (a "theatre piece without words"), the narrative instead conveyed by movement and music. Danny Elfman's score has been adapted and embellished on by composer Terry Davis, who also supplies original pieces for the performance. In conjunction with Burton collaborator Caroline Thompson, director and choreographer Bourne has incorporated both the high Gothic feel of the castle where Edward is born, as well as the oversaturated, pastel tone when Edward joins the Boggs family.

By all accounts they've managed to pull it off. Elements of the original movie – the ice sculpture, bizarre haircuts and exaggerated suburban families – are all a part of the show, but Bourne has also worked in a few surprises, from "dancing shrubbery" to a prologue that better explains Edward's creation.

"The inventor had a young son who was electrocuted by lightning while playing in the garden with scissors," Winsor explains. "It sounds odd, I know, but that's the last image the inventor sees, his son with the scissors fused to him. He then goes about making a new boy in this last image of his son, out of different parts."

Winsor says that Bourne has retained the underlying theme of the original film, the misunderstood outsider at odds with the mainstream, thus giving the stage production a bittersweet as well as comic tone.

"It's quite heartbreaking, but also very freeing by the end with this big duet with the [daughter] Kim Boggs character. During the climax she really accepts him and lets him touch her with these scissors."

The production has garnered rave reviews from the show's LA and New York runs, and a fair amount of attention outside of the world of ballet. That's to be expected, as Oliver-nominated choreographer/director Bourne has gained a reputation as something of an *enfant terrible*, re-imagining *Swan Lake* with an all-male cast, *Carmen* (as *Car Man*) with film noir overtones and Joseph Losey's psychological thriller *The Servant* as the ballet *Play Without Words*.

"You just have to trust the man," says Winsor of Bourne, who also cast him in *Car Man*, and gave him the Edward Scissorhands role without an audition. "He's amazing, and a genius at making the audience see what he wants them to see, focusing them on interesting moments and snippets onstage."

For tickets and more information on the Toronto production visit hummingbirdcentre.com.

Tom Murray



ROADKILL FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

rue-morgue.com/blog
This past January marked the launch of the official Rue Crew blog, a place we fiendishly call The Abattoir. Here, the designers and editors of *Rue Morgue* share their terrible thoughts, odd opinions, anguished artwork and other random scraps of meat not necessarily fit for human consumption. Dig in!

theitsaliveshow.com
Pittsburgh late-night horror program *The It's Alive Show* may well be the city's best kept secret, but not for long, as their website which features local news and events and show merch, makes the weekly broadcast available for web viewing around the world.

poochisland.com
Step right up folks, and feast your eyes on the amazing Pooch! Monster master. Horror junkie. Theme park expert and painter of lowbrow delights inspired by the likes of Ray Harryhausen and H.P. Lovecraft. Guaranteed to amaze!

trashvideo.org/zmdb
It's probably safe to say that if you're a movie fan you've heard of the IMDb, but have you heard of the ZMDb? The Zombie Movie Database, while nowhere near as slick as the former, features an extensive listing of zombie films (some 2528 are currently catalogued), a forum and all the latest zombie movie news.

dedge.com/flash/hangman
Every day is Halloween when you play this clever, spooky take on classic Hangman. In this online Flash game, players choose letters and guess at horror-related words in an attempt to keep the wisecracking skeleton from getting hanged. Kill some time.



VISIT THE RUE MORTUARY, RUE MORGUE'S OFFICIAL MESSAGE BOARD AT WWW.RUE-MORGUE.COM/FORUMS AND JOIN USSSS!

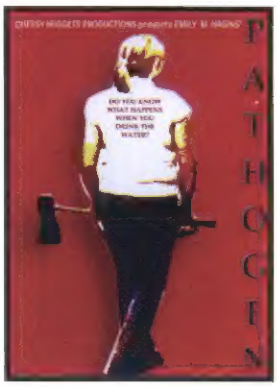
Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
E-mail a link to: **roadkill@rue-morgue.com**

Zombie feature directed by twelve-year-old girl hits DVD

In a story sure to inspire wannabe horror filmmakers of all stripes, a zombie movie made by a sixth-grader from Austin, Texas was recently released on DVD. Emily Hagins (now fourteen) was twelve when she wrote, directed, shot and edited the zombie opus, *Pathogen*. It's the story of five middle-school students fighting to save their town from a contaminated water supply that's creating bloodthirsty reanimated cadavers.

Inspired by Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the young movie lover began making short films with the family pet, Buddy.

"I think almost all of them involve my dog," Hagins tells *Rue Morgue*. "One that sticks out in particular to me was called *Buddy vs. the Barbies*. I don't really know the right way to describe it, but basically my dog is going around chewing up Barbies."



She showed the shorts to Harry Knowles, resident Austin film guru and founder of Ain't it Cool News, who got her an intern gig on the low-budget suspense flick *Organic*, where she shot behind-the-scenes footage and brewed batches of fake blood.

It was in 2003, at Knowles' fifth annual Butt-Numb-A-Thon – a 24-hour film marathon held at Austin's legendary Alamo Drafthouse – that Hagins realized she wanted to make a zombie movie.

"[I] saw the zombie movie *Undead*," she recalls, "which is a sort of silly zombie movie. That movie made me realize that all horror movies aren't completely scary and can actually be kind of fun. I had in mind for a while that I wanted to make a feature film but *Undead* made zombie movies seem like so much fun I wanted to try it."

For her twelfth birthday, Knowles gave her zombie makeup. Shortly afterwards, the aspiring director and her mom, Megan, began securing filming locations.

"I drove, handled craft services, PA'd, did special FX props and makeup, held the boom mic," says Megan, "but Emily handled almost everything. I'm basically a production assistant and chauffeur."

To finance the film, Emily applied to the Austin Film Society's Texas Filmmakers Production Fund and became their youngest grant recipient ever. She also scored professional actor Tiger Darrow (who has worked with director Robert Rodriguez) to co-star in the film. Various friends and family members were also enlisted to play pasty-faced zombies. The experience was captured for a full-length documentary called *Zombie Girl: The Movie* (zombiegirlthemovie.com).

There were setbacks, however. During production, The Hagins' home was robbed, some of the sound was poorly recorded and much of the original planned cast – Emily's school pals – didn't pan out.

"I think at that time none of us knew really how big of a commitment the project was going to be," she admits. "I ended up losing a couple of friends over [the film]."

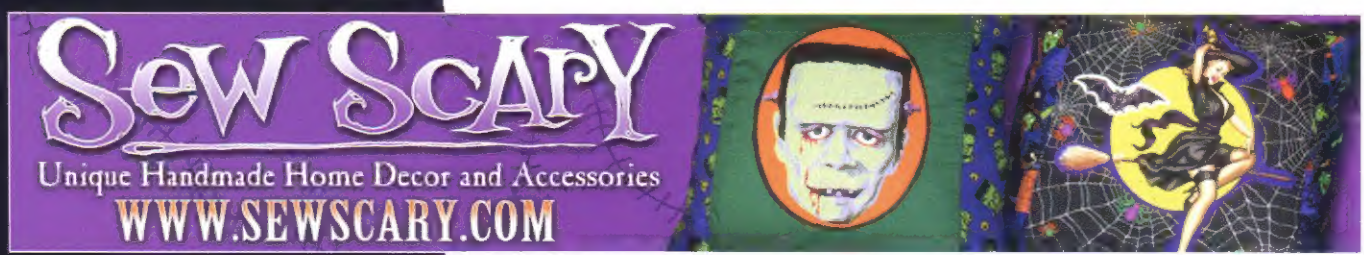
Despite the problems, *Pathogen* has been favourably reviewed by online critics, who appreciate, among other aspects of it, the unexpected amount of gore, including an eyeball gouged out with a knitting needle and some preteen cannibalism.

"The characters and plot hold up with very few gaps in logic or continuity. It is entertaining and scary and even shows a little sophisticated irony and humour," says Megan.

Emily, however, remains humble about the achievement: "For me, the press is reassurance that I didn't make a totally bad movie. I'm hoping to learn from my mistakes and do better on my next one."

Pathogen DVDs are now available through the film's website, cheesynuggets.com. Emily's latest script, a ghost story, is currently undergoing revisions. Now it's only a matter of waiting for summer vacation.

David Bertrand



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The Coroner's Report 13

Weird Stats Morbid Facts

✝ Paris' Carnavalet Museum houses a human skin-bound copy of the French Constitution from 1793.

✝ Lon Chaney Sr. appeared in over 150 films during his lifetime, but only 40 of them survive today.

✝ In the past, British grave robbers had several popular nicknames including "Sack-Em-Up Men" and "Diggum Uppers."

✝ Vincent Price spent much of his early acting career playing a romantic lead.

✝ Folklore of yesteryear suggested that headache sufferers might find relief by wearing a buzzard's head around their neck.

✝ Canadian actor David Manners, who portrayed John Harker in Tod Browning's 1931 version of *Dracula*, claimed, right up until his death in 1998, that he'd never seen the film, nor had any interest in watching it.

✝ History's worst crocodile attack occurred on the Burmese island of Ramree on February 19, 1945, when a turn in the war forced 1000 Japanese soldiers to trek across sixteen kilometres of mangrove swamps – home to thousands of crocs. Only 20 soldiers survived the journey.

✝ Actor Lance Henriksen (*Aliens*, *Millennium*) dropped out of school at age twelve and was illiterate until he was 30, when he used film scripts to teach himself how to read.

✝ Vampire bats must consume blood at least once every two days or they will die.

✝ When Jenny Clack of the University of Cambridge discovered the fossil of an extinct amphibian in what was once a swamp, she named it Eucritta melanolimnetes in homage to a 1954 horror film. The scientific name, when translated from Greek, means "the creature from the black lagoon."

✝ Knights who fought in the Crusades were interred with their legs crossed, which meant that they died in the Christian faith.

✝ Francis Ford Coppola was so unhappy with Gary Oldman's scream as Dracula in the 1992 film of the same title, that Lux Interior from The Cramps was hired to re-record it.

✝ Two Tanzanian men were recently arrested for purportedly killing a nine-year-old boy in order to sell his skin for the equivalent of $20,000 USD. Local superstitions, particularly in the country's Southern regions, suggest that charms and potions made from human skin will bring their users monetary wealth.

Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com.

The Rue Morgue Sick Top Six

Instances of Crucifixions



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Christ on a cross!
2. *The Hills Have Eyes*
Flame-broiled father
3. *The Unholy*
Upside down and inside out
4. *Carrie*
Maternal cutlery magnet
5. *Witchfinder General*
Overheated heretic
6. *Calvaire*
The Passion of "Gloria"




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WITH BOTH THE ORIGINAL FILM AND THE SECOND SEQUEL DUE FOR RE-RELEASE NEXT MONTH FROM ANCHOR BAY, DON COSCARELLI REMINISCES ABOUT HIS GENRE-BENDING, SKULL-DRILLING, SHAPE-SHIFTING SERIES, PHANTASM.



IN THE SHADOW OF THE TALL MAN

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

phan·tasm: *(noun) 1. An apparition or spectre 2. A creation of the imagination or fancy; fantasy 3. A mental image or representation of a real object 4. An illusory likeness of something*

If the above dictionary definitions indicate anything, it's that when filmmaker Don Coscarelli dreamed up his 1979 cult horror film *Phantasm*, he had the liberty to make it as abstract as he wanted. With that freedom in mind, he set upon making one of the most bizarre, genre-bending independent horror films to come out of the late '70s.

In the story, two recently orphaned brothers and an ice cream vendor investigate strange goings-on at the local mortuary and discover that the proprietor – a towering, sinister undertaker – is actually a time-travelling, dimension-jumping grave robber whose minions include a small army of killer dwarves, a mysterious blonde seductress and an arsenal of flying, cranium-drilling metal spheres.

But just how much of this is real, and how much is actually twelve-year-old Mike Pearson's post-traumatic delusion? Is the Tall Man actually death personified, or simply a manifestation of the catastrophic changes that have recently thrown our young hero's life into chaos? Is he a Freudian spectre of encroaching adolescence? Some nightmare caricature of male authority? And – probably a more important question – with muscle cars, guitars, gunplay, gore and no small amount of comic relief tossed into the mix, how could all of the above ingredients *not* have birthed horror cinema's last bona fide cult classic of the 1970s?

Coscarelli was barely into his twenties when production on *Phantasm* began, but he already had two previous low-budget features to his credit – *Jim the World's Greatest*, a drama co-starring Tall Man-to-be Angus Scrimm (under his real name Lawrence Rory Guy) as an abusive alcoholic father, and the children's comedy *Kenny & Company*, with a ten-year-old A. Michael Baldwin in a supporting role and Reggie Bannister as a gym teacher.

A horror fan since childhood, the young filmmaker was eager to dive into the genre and bring to life his vision of an unrelenting, unpredictable thrill ride, and if he had to do it on a budget of only $300,000, well, so be it. Corralling Scrimm (see p.18), Baldwin and Bannister (p. 22), and rounding out his cast with actor/musician Bill Thornbury as Mike's older brother Jody, Coscarelli signed up the small ensemble cast that would populate four of his films over the next twenty years, although *Phantasm* was, as far as he was concerned at the time, a one-off.

Independent American horror cinema was still enjoying an unprecedented (and lengthy) boom in 1979. While *Halloween* and *Dawn of the Dead* were exploding into the collective consciousness and changing the genre forever, *Phantasm* enjoyed significant, if less spectacular, success while flying largely under the radar on the drive-in and grindhouse circuit, in much

All photos Copyright Silver Sphere Corp

the same fashion as films such as *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Suspiria* had several years earlier. Coscarelli went on to helm the sword-and-sorcery cult fave *Beastmaster* which, despite considerable box-office success, proved a singularly unpleasant experience for the filmmaker and his long-time production partner Paul Pepperman, a classic tale of studio executive meddling that ultimately resulted in Pepperman leaving the film business permanently.

Still, over the intervening years, the *Phantasm* cult continued to grow, in part because of its boldly strange mythos and audacity to toggle between horror and sci-fi, as well as the growing popularity of the mysterious Tall Man. Between the audience that had first experienced the film during its theatrical run and an even larger following who were now discovering it during the home video boom of the '80s, fans – now dubbed "Phans" – were clamouring for a sequel. Despite the *Beastmaster* fiasco, Coscarelli reluctantly accepted studio backing from Universal for *Phantasm II*, the film that truly spawned the mythos as we know it.

Even today, with four films in the can (see p.19 for a look at the entire series), it's a testimony to both Scrimm's charisma and Coscarelli's steadfast refusal to demystify his villain that the Tall Man hasn't been recycled into redundancy like a couple of lumbering, masked serial slashers we could all name, or watered down into a cartoon.

As patient and judicious as ever when determining the next step in horror's most unorthodox franchise, Coscarelli muses about *Phantasm*'s past and uncertain yet promising future.





Where did the idea for* Phantasm *come from?

The basic scenario of *Phantasm* came from my fascination and revulsion with death and how it manifests itself here in America. How the corpse is spirited away behind closed doors by the mysterious, black-clad mortician to a place we are not allowed to go. Then the corpse is drained, injected and re-fabricated by the embalmer, turned into a freaky resemblance of the original person and then grandly interred with great ceremony. The wicked embalming tools, the sealed caskets and the sleek black funeral coaches are just amazing props. I knew this subject would make for a great horror movie.

And the silver sphere?

I had a dream, just your basic nightmare, only I found myself being pursued down unending corridors by this silver sentinel which I could not escape. Unlike most of my dreams, this one stuck with me. And while writing *Phantasm* it seemed like a perfect device with which to arm the Tall Man, a digital vampire, if you will.

Much like Clive Barker's Lament Configuration, it's taken on an iconic presence yet remains mysterious; is there a story about the sphere(s) that's waiting to be told?

One thing I've learned about *Phantasm* is that it is never over. There may actually be thousands of *Phantasm* stories yet to be told. *Phantasm*, by design, is an open-ended storyline that allows audiences to fill in the gaps. I think this is the charm and the allure of it. The creativity of our fan base is rather stunning, and over the years I have seen amazing and inspired fan-written novels, short stories, comic books and web tales that extend and enhance the franchise. It's not the kind of pre-digested pap you find in many films as it allows the audience to participate, draw their own conclusions and ruminate on the *Phantasm* concepts long after the film ends. A sphere point-of-view story would be really cool. I ventured into that territory a bit with *Phantasm III* in which one of the key characters was encapsulated in a sphere.

What steered your career into the horror genre in the first place?

I think that doing a film in the sci-fi/horror genre was inevitable for me. As a boy, all I watched were horror films and all I read was science fiction. I think what really got me started in that direction was a preview screening of my second film, *Kenny & Company*. *Kenny* was a crazed comedy about twelve-year-old boys. There was a sequence on Halloween night in a haunted house involving a man in a monster costume who jumped out, scaring the characters. To my amazement the audience screamed in surprise. They literally jumped out of their seats! For a young filmmaker – I was 22 at the time – to be able to make several hundred people jump in the air on cue was rather phenomenal. So I decided that in my next film I would go for screams, the more the better.

Phantasm is a very unconventional genre film in that it shifts from horror to sci-fi. At the time, it was a bit of a gamble. Would a film like that be received well today or do you feel it was a product of its time?

When I was a kid they played sci-fi/horror movies from the '50s on TV all the time. William Cameron Menzies' *Invaders from Mars* was a favourite and you can see its influences in *Phantasm*. I was



ANGUS SCRIMM WAXES ON HIS ICONIC ROLE AS THE WORLD'S TALLEST EXTRATERRESTRIAL MORTICIAN.

GRAVE ROBBER FROM OUTER SPACE

BY BRAD ABRAHAM

If a movie's only as good as its villain, then a horror movie's only as good as its monster. With Freddy, Jason and Leatherface cutting such bloody profiles, what then explains the appeal of a lanky undertaker in an ill-fitting suit? Angus Scrimm's the Tall Man is the most famous grave robber from outer space since Bela Lugosi's character in *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. With his soaring, skull-drilling silver spheres and squat monk-like helpers, the Tall Man is a being born of nightmares. He is cold and calculating, deliberate and focused. He cannot be destroyed, nor bargained with. He is an incarnation of the inevitable end we all face: death.

"The Tall Man is the physical embodiment of that most universal of fears," Scrimm tells *Rue Morgue*. "One of his most quoted lines is evidenced by that fear that when you die, you don't go to heaven or hell, but rather, you go to *him*."

The irony is that an actor whose most famous role has induced nightmares in legions of horror fans is one of the most charming, urbane gentlemen in the profession, born Lawrence Rory Guy in Kansas City. "My oft-coined pen name seemed a perfect fit for the Tall Man, as I'm afraid Lawrence Guy isn't as imposing on a horror movie poster as Angus Scrimm," he chuckles, adding that for the record, he's not as tall as his most famous character. "I'm not but then who is?"

After studying at the USC theatre school and enjoying a successful Grammy-winning career as a liner notes writer for The Beatles and Frank Sinatra, among others, Scrimm returned to acting career with Curtis (*L.A. Confidential*) Hanson's directorial debut *Sweet Kill*. That was followed by a role in the debut film from a young filmmaker named Don Coscarelli: *Jim the World's Greatest*. When Coscarelli later conceived *Phantasm* and its infamous monster, there was only one actor who could fill the Tall Man's shoes.

"Don likes to tell that my sardonic scowls [while waiting lengthy intervals between takes on *Jim* only to be sent home] intimidated him and inspired him to create the Tall Man," he explains. "Of course, this is all bosh; I am a pussycat."

He may be a pussycat, but his performance as the Tall Man cemented him as one of the genre's most terrifying villains, whose allure Scrimm says is tied directly into the film's unique concept.

"I think the appeal [of *Phantasm*] was that at its debut it was that rare beast, an utterly original horror film. Though its innovations were immediately and endlessly copied, it has still retained its freshness," he says. "And, of course, it deals with the great life conundrum that obsesses humanity from early childhood, death, in a way that entertains, intrigues, frightens and stimulates inward questioning."

The 80-year-old's personal and professional relationship with Coscarelli spans more than 30 years and he has nothing but praise for the filmmaker, who he most recently worked with again on the *Masters of Horror* episode *Incident On and off a Mountain Road*.

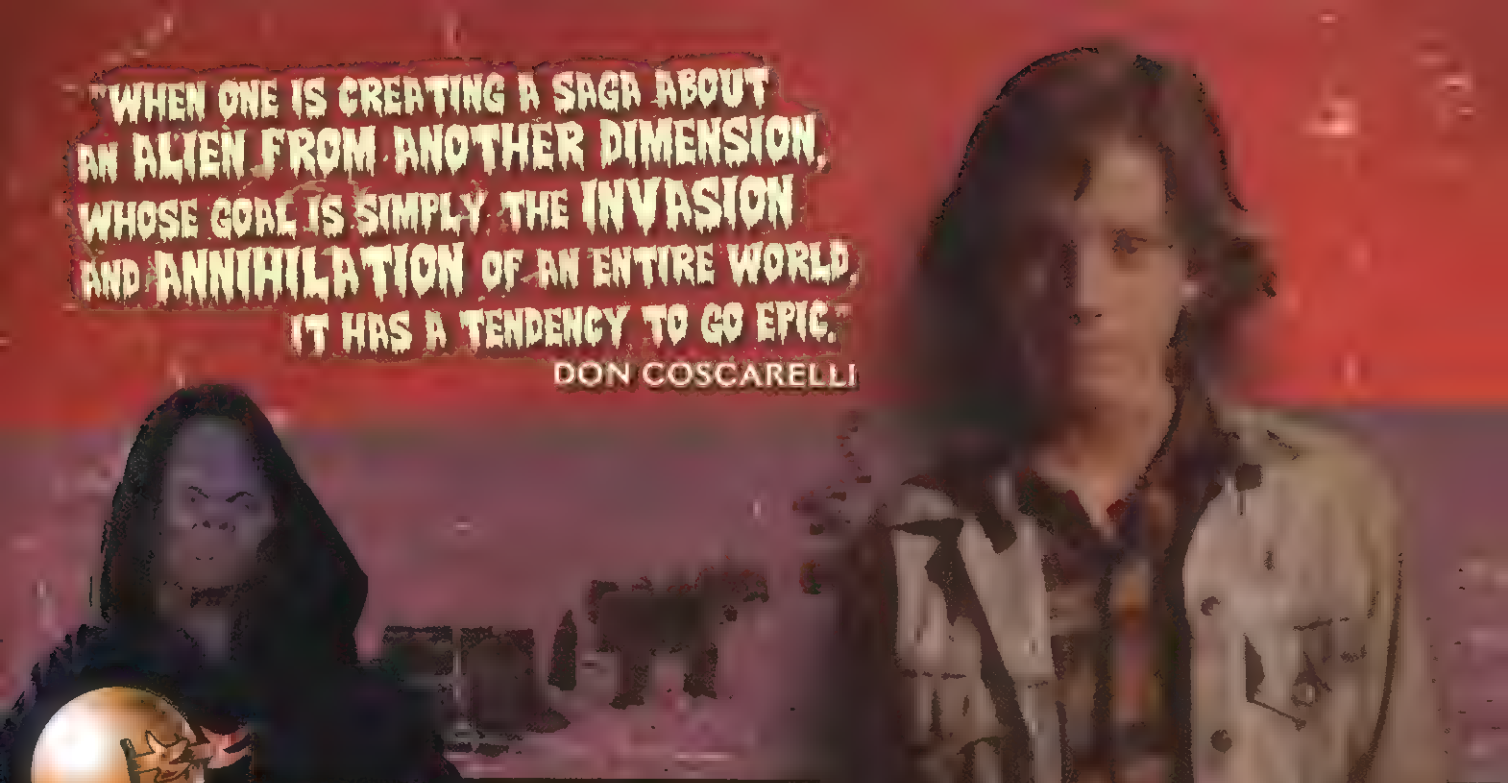
For Scrimm, the most surprising result of playing the Tall Man has been "the affection that despicable character has brought to me personally, as well as to him, from film enthusiasts and filmmakers all over the world." It was long-time "Phan" J.J. Abrams who cast Scrimm in the recurring role of SD-6 agent Calvin McCullough on *Alias*, and the actor recently appeared in James McKinney's sci-fi thriller *Automatons*. Scrimm has also been commemorated in a NECA collectible figure of the Tall Man.

"Being immortalized in plastic certainly symbolizes something, but I'm not sure iconic status is it," he notes. "Don gave me one, which I prize for its endearing resemblance to one of the all-time great film actors: John Carradine. Of course, his name nowhere appears on the box but neither does Angus Scrimm's!"

With rumours of a fifth *Phantasm* film lurking at the edges of nightmare, it's quite possible we haven't seen the end of the Tall Man – a character Scrimm jokes is really only like him in one important way. "We both have yellow blood!"

"WHEN ONE IS CREATING A SAGA ABOUT AN ALIEN FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION, WHOSE GOAL IS SIMPLY THE INVASION AND ANNIHILATION OF AN ENTIRE WORLD, IT HAS A TENDENCY TO GO EPIC."

DON COSCARELLI



Trans-dimensional dwarves assist the Tall Man in terrorizing Mike Pearson (A. Michael Baldwin) in ***Phantasm.***

searching for a way to surprise audiences, to take them off the beaten track to a point where they feel they're losing control. Good horror films do that. You have to create a reality of the unexpected and veering off into sci-fi and fantasy was a great way to do it. I think the typical studio films tend to stay locked in their genres and not stray. Those films are more of a business proposition rather than any kind of artistic expression. There's no question in my mind that today's audiences would enthusiastically embrace a film that melded genres.

There's also an epic storytelling feel to the Phantasm world, particularly with the archetypal characters and the way it unfolds through a child's eyes. Is this key to its success?

When one is creating a saga about an alien from another dimension, whose goal is simply the invasion and annihilation of an entire world, it has a tendency to go epic. In the *Phantasm* saga, the two brothers and their best pal Reggie must face down the forces of evil in the persona of the sinister Tall Man. It's a simple struggle of good versus evil and life versus death, but those conflicts loom large in all our lives and that may be why audiences find the films worth watching a second and third time. I also think the *Phantasm* theme and score by Fred Myrow and Malcolm Seagrave has an epic component to it that subsequent composer Chris Stone has enhanced beautifully.

Much of Phantasm's charm derives from Mike Pearson being a very vividly drawn character – seemingly plucked from real life – and yet by all accounts his life was markedly different from your own. Was he based on someone else you knew?

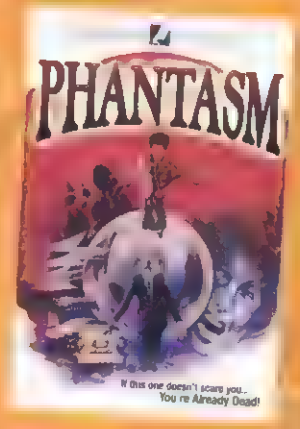
I was 22-years-old when I wrote the screenplay for *Phantasm*. I wish I could say that back then I had the ability of Twain or Hemingway to dream up original characters. I guess Mike Pearson was based on me, [with] some significant differences. I never had an older brother – and perhaps Mike's fear of losing his brother came from my desire to have an older brother – and my parents weren't killed when I was twelve. I guess I should give myself some credit for using a technique in which I wrote generally about myself but coloured it with a couple of large differences.

Even some ardent Phans are unaware that you started making films at a very early age. Do you still meet people who are shocked that you're only now in your early 50s? And do you think that getting such an early start and being largely self-taught were determining factors in your fierce independence as a filmmaker?

AS THE FOUR FILMS IN THE SERIES INDICATE, ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN THE *PHANTASM* UNIVERSE. PRESENTING...

THE COMPLETE PHANTASMOGRAPHY

PHANTASM (1979)



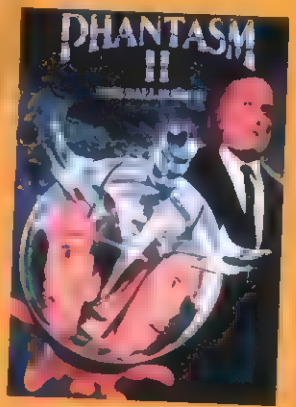
There are cult horror films and then there are cult horror films and then there's *Phantasm*. It's a story which has its genesis in writer/director Don Coscarelli's fascination with funerary customs, some of which he found quaint, some disgusting and some downright pointless. Against that macabre backdrop, Coscarelli constructed one of the most unpredictable and inventive horror/sci-fi hybrids of the '70s, doubling as a bittersweet coming-of-age story told almost exclusively from the point of view of recently orphaned twelve-year-old, Mike Pearson (played by A. Michael Baldwin). The questions of loyalty, friendship, family and the fear of abandonment that hang heavy in the air are alleviated by wild action sequences and moments of terror (courtesy of the film's trademark ghoulish funeral director and his head-drilling, flying silver spheres) that veer between horror and pulpy boys' adventure tales.

While its bizarre plot and surreal imagery set *Phantasm* firmly apart from almost all of its '70s peers, the films's most remarkable quality remains its authentically Gothic horror feel. *Phantasm* faithfully channels its ancestors (primarily the early Universal classics and American sci-fi films of the 1950s) while never skimping on the more visceral and graphic thrills idiomatic of the late '70s. And if the reader will indulge this writer with an autobiographical aside, *Phantasm* was the single film which, one fateful night at the drive-in several decades ago, transformed me from a mere horror fan into an obsessed crazoid who, no longer content to simply watch horror films, would begin to collect, research and – god help you all – write about them. (No mean feat, given that *Phantasm* was double-billed with *Halloween* on the night in question!)

PHANTASM II (1988)

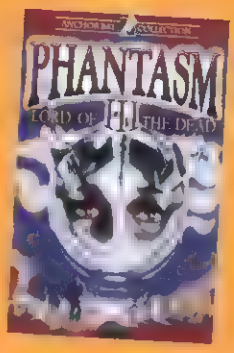
After seven years in a mental hospital, Mike (now played by James LeGros of *Drugstore Cowboy* fame, who beat out then-unknown Brad Pitt for the role) is released into the custody of ice cream man Reggie. Initially convinced that Mike is delusional, Reggie abruptly changes his tune after the Tall Man kills his wife and daughter. With a trunk full of improbable homemade weaponry, our oddball heroes hit the road in Reggie's cool-as-fuck Hemicuda and head north to hunt down the Tall Man, fully aware that simultaneously he's hunting them. Mike is also searching for Liz (angelic ingenue Paula Irvine), another of the Tall Man's victims with whom Mike shares a psychic link. Future *Penthouse* Pet and reality show host Samantha Phillips plays Alchemy, a mysterious hitchhiker Mike and Reggie pick up.

Nearly as beloved as the original, and in some respects superior to it, *Phantasm II*'s bigger budget allowed Coscarelli to imbue the sequel with near-relentless action right out of the gate and ramp up the special effects significantly, including new and improved flying spheres, now equipped with circular saws and lasers. An inspired bit of casting also saw Kenneth Tigar (a recurring guest star on *Barney Miller*) in the role of Father Myers, an alcoholic priest who briefly locks horns with the Tall Man before coming to an extremely nasty end.



Although "Phans" remain somewhat divided over the merits of subsequent sequels, *Phantasm II* is cherished unreservedly by the Phaithful. So why do the spoilsports at Universal still refuse to give it a proper North American DVD release?

PHANTASM III: LORD OF THE DEAD (1994)



Is *Phantasm III* a misstep for the series? Most Phans would agree it is, but how much of a misstep – and in which respects – is very much open to debate. Many point to a conspicuous overreliance on cheap jokes, while others bemoan a lack of any significant development in the storyline or revelations about the Tall Man and the nature of his relationship with Mike (played once again by A. Michael Baldwin, now grown-up). The charges aren't without some merit, but there's still a great deal to love about *Lord of the Dead*, not least of which is Coscarelli's continued growth as a director of high action, particularly evident in the ever-more-outrageous silver sphere hijinks and one of the most spectacular single-vehicle crash stunts in cinema history, which knocked stuntman (and long-time Phan) Bob Ivy unconscious.

Joining Mike and Reggie as they chase (and are chased by) the Tall Man across Oregon and Idaho are Rocky (Gloria Lynne Henry), a tough ex-soldier who also fights off Reggie's amorous advances, and Tim (Kevin Connors), a young orphan we first meet as he wreaks havoc on looters in his booby-trapped house in a sequence Coscarelli refers to as "*Home Alone* on steroids." Bill Thornbury also returns as Jody, Mike's late older brother, now a wandering spirit who wants to help but inadvertently draws the unwanted attention of You Know Who.

PHANTASM: OBLIVION (1998)

Phans have long been willing to overlook their beloved series' occasional lapses in logic, but many found *OblIVion*'s open-ended and frequently non-linear structure a chore. On the other hand, those of us who had particularly enjoyed the more surreal aspects of previous chapters were in for a treat, albeit a frequently obtuse one. Cobbled together for a scant $700,000 – the lowest budget since the original – *OblIVion* was essentially Coscarelli's Plan B after funding repeatedly fell apart for *Phantasm's End*, a proposed big-budget affair with a script by Roger Avary (co-screenwriter of *Pulp Fiction*, screenwriter of *Silent Hill*). The result is paradoxically the most structurally ambitious installment in the series, while also in many respects surprisingly low-key.

Convinced that he's doomed, Mike steals a hearse and hightails it deep into the California desert, determined to take the Tall Man down with him by any means necessary. Egged on by still-disembodied Jody, Reggie gives chase in his muscle car, under intermittent attack by the Tall Man's confederates. One of *OblIVion*'s great charms is Coscarelli's clever interweaving of unused footage from the original *Phantasm* as flashbacks, lending the film a unique conceit: a single actor (Baldwin) playing the same character at the ages of twelve and 32 in the same film. In another ballsy (as it were) move, Coscarelli gives us the most pivotal revelation of the *Phantasm* mythos to date: that the Tall Man was once a kindly Civil War-era physician named Jebediah Morningside. Still, many unanswered questions remain and with its cryptic and uncharacteristically gentle finale, *OblIVion* doesn't so much end as dissolve.





*The dead return in **Phantasm III** and (opposite) a sentinal sphere drills a priest in **Phantasm II**.*



*The Tall Man claws for solid ground in **Phantasm**.*

I did get an early start. In my naive and youthful exuberance I swore that I'd make a feature film [*Jim the World's Greatest*] while I was still in my teens and to my amazement I actually pulled it off. Universal Studios even bought it for distribution. I never went to film school. My first year at UCLA they told me I'd have to wait two years to enter the film program. I'd been making small movies, documentaries and even TV commercials with my neighborhood gang of friends all through high school. There was no way I was going to wait around at college for two years just to begin their program. So I left college and convinced my father to stake me in a micro-budget feature. That film was my college! It took four years, and it was certainly "learn by doing." They say that "self-taught is best taught," but the great thing about movies is that you don't need college to have some great teachers, and I did have those teachers in filmmakers like Kubrick, Polanski, Bogdanovich, Coppola, Murnau, Griffith, Whale… the list of directors I studied goes on and on. As to being "fiercely independent," there's no question that when you control a modest-budget film you can pretty much do what you want to, and express yourself artistically without interference. I have had some bad experiences in which producers and studio big-shot types have meddled creatively. It's something I try to avoid at all costs. There's nothing more heartbreaking than having a film come out with your name on it loaded with mistakes made by other people.

Where on earth – or beyond – did you dig up Angus Scrimm?

Angus was the first working actor I ever directed. We were casting *Jim the World's Greatest* and Angus walked into an open casting call to read for the down-on-his-luck alcoholic father role. He was amazing! But Angus could also be very intimidating. The film was done on a micro-budget with a mostly teenage crew and we made quite a few mistakes. Frequently, Angus would be made to wait in a musty old apartment dressing room for twelve hours and it would be my job to walk back there and inform him that we were finished.



PHANTASM'S GUN-TOTING, GUITAR-PICKING, UNDEAD ASS-KICKING SOFT-SERVE EXPERT REGGIE BANNISTER DISCUSSES HIS NAMESAKE CHARACTER.

BEWARE THE ICE CREAM MAN

BY [illegible]

It takes a rare breed to survive one *Phantasm* film unscathed, never mind the whole series. Like many horror movies, *Phantasm*'s signature star is its villain – Angus Scrimm's reality-bending, shape-shifting alien Tall Man – and even the most virtuous characters are rarely spared the business end of his skull-drilling silver spheres of death by the time the credits roll.

But ass-kicking, guitar-picking, soft-serve specialist Reggie Bannister has made it through all four films over the course of two decades. Armed with intestinal fortitude, incredible luck (except with women) and one big motherfuckin' custom-built shotgun, he's been the comrade-in-arms to long-suffering Mike Pearson (alternately played by A. Michael Baldwin and James LeGros) in the endless battle against the Tall Man's diminutive army of the undead.

"I think Reggie's the kind of every guy's guy," says Bannister from his California home. "He got pulled into this thing kicking and screaming, but once he realized the gravity of the situation, he just jumps right in. When he grabs that shotgun and goes on the hunt, you feel like you're with him, or you *are* him."

A normal guy in some pretty abnormal situations. Part of *Phantasm*'s enduring popularity is writer/director Don Coscarelli's adept balancing of the humorous against the horrifying, and it's Bannister who's most often on the receiving end of both – usually at the same time.

"I've watched a lot of old comics, and generally their biggest laughs come when they're in danger," he explains. "Like Harold Lloyd hanging from a clock, twenty storeys above ground [in his famous 1923 film *Safety Last!*] – that's a pretty dire situation. It's certainly not funny to the character, but it's funny to watch. So I generally try to play it straight. Like in *Phantasm III* when I'm being chased down the hall by the gold sphere and I'm looking for a weapon. I find what looks like a big stick, and I pull it out and it turns out to be a plunger. All of that is funny, even though it's pretty dire straits for the Reggie character."

Often referred to by Coscarelli as his personal good luck charm, the actor has been a regular member of the director's roster since his first feature, *Jim the World's Greatest*. When the time came to make *Phantasm*, Coscarelli wrote a role so suited to the actor, he named it for him. But is Reggie Bannister really like Reggie the Ice Cream Man?

"He's a bit different. From his own mouth he says he's not the sharpest knife in the drawer," quips Bannister. "He's a pretty big horn-dog, and I'm not quite that big a horn-dog. But the basic qualities of the character are really me. I'm a really good friend, I'm very loyal. And I think Don really wanted a character like that to be the glue in the relationship between the two brothers, and he wrote that with me in mind, for sure."

Bannister's not unlike his namesake when it comes to absorbing absurd amounts of physical punishment, either: "I generally get hurt once or twice during the making of a *Phantasm* film," admits Bannister, who does all of his own stunts in the movies. Ironically, his biggest *Phantasm*-related injury doesn't appear onscreen, although evidence of it is visible in the form of the enormous red welt that appears on his head during *Phantasm*'s space gate sequence, as he dodges flying black barrels while struggling to avoid being pulled into another dimension.

"Yeah, I got nailed on that one, man. They were throwing these barrels over my head to make it look like they were getting sucked into the space gate. And [*Phantasm* co-producer] Paul Pepperman was the one who hit me, I think. He threw a little too low and I raised a little too high and I got nailed right on the forehead."

While awaiting the call to once again dust off his four-barrelled dwarf-killer, Bannister has expanded his filmic experience both in front of and behind the camera, most recently with the upcoming period horror film *Carnies*, where he serves as assistant director and associate producer, along with his wife, makeup artist Gigi (who worked on *Phantasm IV*). He's also in Robert Kurtzman's *The Rage*.

"I play a guy named Uncle Ben [in *The Rage*], and I have this kind of idyllic, Norman Rockwell scene with these two kids who are my niece and nephew, and then things go horribly wrong. So like it or not, there's gonna be a lot of Reggie Bannister coming up."

shooting for the day and would not be getting to his scenes. Without a word, Angus would pin me with a glance and raise that eyebrow of his in what was later to be known as the "Tall Man glare." I would stutter an apology and hastily back out of the room, knees knocking. He terrified me then and I resolved to one day star him in a pirate movie or a horror film.

Did you always plan for the Tall Man to be a shape-shifting alien?

Originally, the female character, the "Lady in Lavender" played by Kat Lester, was written as a minion of the Tall Man. During shooting, I came up with this bizarre notion that perhaps she and the Tall Man might be one and the same person. I didn't have the nerve to divulge this to the actors as I was afraid they might freak out. Kat's a terrific actress with a good sense of humour and Angus is a pretty sharp cookie himself. I think both of them figured out what I was up to and just decided to roll with the weirdness. It's certainly not the kind of thing one's taught in acting school.

Is the character based on a real person?

Of course. I had a neighbour who was a very tall, shape-shifting alien, with yellow blood, limbs that would spontaneously regenerate and a nasty habit of glaring at me and uttering declarative one-word sentences. He was also pretty good at time travel and dimension hopping. We got into a bit of a dust up when I was about twelve-years-old and me and my neighborhood gang of friends were forced to kick his ass and send him packing back to Mars or wherever the hell he came from. [Laughs]

Wonderful! Did you ever imagine such an experience would culminate in a film franchise and spawn its own mythos?

Certainly not when we were making the original film! I was just trying to get the damned thing finished and hopefully get it into a few theatres. At best, my goal was to make a little horror film that might propel an audience member or two out of their seats on occasion. To think that some decades later people would still be watching, talking or thinking about *Phantasm* was totally unimaginable at the time. However, as I shot the film I was the first to see that certain things were working really well. Angus was terrifying as the Tall Man. A. Michael Baldwin was giving the best performance by a child actor I'd ever seen. Bill Thornbury was great, and Reggie Bannister was creating this super-cool persona with the potential to be a major ass-kicker of the undead. The sphere prop was actually working as an onscreen driller-killer and the black Plymouth muscle car simply rocked. So I had a notion it might turn out okay. But if anything, it was the fans who elevated our little tale into myth. They're the ones that created the word of mouth, the superheated speculation about what the intentions of the film were. They enthusiastically supported each and every sequel and swarmed the conventions barraging us with questions about it.



The goopy demise of the Tall Man at the end of Phantasm II and (below) the silver sphere makes brain juice out of a ghoul in the first film



The last time you spoke with Rue Morgue, a deal with New Line was in the works for more Phantasm projects. There's plenty of talk about remakes and sequels. What's the status of the series?

In the past couple years there have been many companies with serious interest in remaking *Phantasm*. While a *Phantasm* remake done by a visionary filmmaker is a really amazing concept – something I would actually like to watch myself – the way these remakes usually turn out is rather unfortunate. For now, out of respect to the fans, it's off the table. But one never knows.

When you speak of actually liking the idea of a Phantasm remake by a "visionary filmmaker," who would be your top choices?

It's fun to fantasize [about] what somebody else might do with the franchise. Imagine what Takashi Miike, or Kar Wai Wong, or even Roman Polanski might create in the *Phantasm* world.

Tell us about Roger Avary's involvement with Phantasm.

Back in the mid-'90s Roger received the Academy Award for writing *Pulp Fiction* with Quentin Tarantino. Roger is an amazing writer and director. His *Rules of Attraction* was probably one of the most cinematic films I've seen in recent memory. So after winning the Oscar, when he probably should have declared, "I'm going to Disneyland!" instead, Roger pronounced, "I'm going to write the kick-ass, franchise-ending, most expensive and hyper-violent *Phantasm* movie ever made!" It was a simply awesome script, but we never found a studio executive with the balls to fund it. Maybe someday we can put it out as a graphic novel.

Any plans for another Masters of Horror episode?

For me, *Masters of Horror* was a one-shot deal. I really put my heart and soul into *Incident On and Off a Mountain Road* and it was like moving heaven and earth to get it filmed under the budget constraints and the ten-day schedule. In hindsight, I could have made a feature film with that amount of effort. However, I really enjoyed working with co-writer Stephen Romano and the fabulous cast and great Canadian crew. Also, being able to create a non-Tall Man role for Angus Scrimm and then watching him hit it out of the park was just a delight.

Finally, our readers would sic silver spheres on us if we didn't ask the status of Bubba Nosferatu.

The script is finished, and this one will explore the dark and unholy relationship between Elvis and his nefarious manager, Colonel Tom Parker. It will also feature some pretty cool vampire-fu with Elvis battling some hot and dangerous chicks with fangs. So strap on your jumpsuits, baby, it's gonna be a wild ride!



As two new cartoon *Hellboy* films illustrate, MIKE MIGNOLA's signature devil kid kicks ass no matter how he's conjured.

ANIMATING HELLBOY

BY JAMES CRAWLEY

Big Red aficionados can hardly be blamed for muttering a collective "Oh crap" after hearing that their beloved *Hellboy* had been green-lit for two full-length animated features to premiere on the Cartoon Network. Fearing that Mike Mignola's enigmatic, existentialist hero from Hell would be replaced by a tagline-spewing wise guy surrounded by cutesy sidekicks with Cockney accents, fans pre-lamented the project with ALL CAPS and exclamation points on internet fan sites. But as Tad Stones, supervising director and producer of the two animated films, tells *Rue Morgue*, he had no intention of dumbing down the franchise or playing it safe for the kiddies.

"I was chuckling when I read the fan reaction," he says, "because that very day I was approving the bathtub-full-of-blood scene for the second film!"

That second installment, which airs March 10 (with a DVD release from Starz Home Entertainment set for May), is aptly titled *Blood and Iron* and features, among other things that go bump in the night, a vampire based on 17th-century serial killer Countess Bathory (she of the bathing-in-the-blood-of-virgins fetish) and a scene in which *Hellboy* franchise regular Abe Sapien is tortured by a pair of cannibalistic harpies. So much for horror-lite.

Worries that the features would ignore Mignola's multi-layered stories and rich borrowings from world mythology and pop culture in favour of WWE-style fight scenes and sight gags were put to rest when *Sword of Storms*, the first film (now available on DVD), aired on the network last fall.

The story of an ancient sword that imprisons a pair of Japanese storm demons, *Sword of Stones* throws Hellboy into an alternative universe where he battles a gaggle of ghouls from the dark side of Japanese folklore, including the much-loved floating heads from Mignola's *The Right Hand of Doom* graphic novel. Meanwhile, Abe Sapien and Liz Sherman go head-to-head with a decidedly Lovecraftian sea creature. So far, fan reaction has been mostly positive, and things should only improve when the much darker and more graphic *Blood and Iron* airs.

But things might have gone differently if Stones' original plan for the animated *Hellboy* had gone [illegible] fan of Mignola's [illegible] spent almost 30

pitched *Hellboy Animated* to the studio as a prime-time animated series as far back as 1994.

"The animated *X-Files* is how I pitched it," Stones recalls. "They were looking for something more like a *Simpsons*-type comedy. Thank goodness, because we could have ended up with something like 'Heckboy.'"

How the animated films got to the small screen is almost as complicated as a typical *Hellboy* plot. In the long years of trying to get the live-action movie off the ground – it was finally released in 2004 – Mignola and Guillermo del Toro also looked for backers for an animated *Hellboy* project. Mignola met Stones while the two worked at Disney on an animated series based on the *Atlantis* movie (the series was eventually shelved) and they began talking about working together on a *Hellboy* cartoon of some sort.

After Stones left Disney in 2003, he wrote a couple of half-hour *Hellboy* TV episodes, which he showed Mignola. Mignola and del Toro liked the scripts and wanted Stones on board for a series they were pitching to the Cartoon Network. Hoping that the project would eventually get off the ground, Stones and Mignola fleshed out ideas for the animated series, including Abe Sapien and Liz Sherman solo stories. The half-hour TV series never happened, but a consortium of studios and producers eventually secured funding for two animated features, with more to follow if the first two performed well.

According to Stones, the duo found out the deal had gone down while they were both appearing at the 2005 San Diego Comic Convention.

"We were both a little stunned and said, 'But what about all of our little stories?' But then Mike said, 'Wait a minute, this is a good thing, we get to do two *Hellboy* movies!'" First, among the advantages of doing animated features was the chance to give the franchise the big-screen treatment without the budget restrictions of a live-action film. No story concept was too grandiose, no setting too exotic or out of the way for animation. They could take the time to explore the mythology and back story of the *Hellboy* universe while sending the dedicated agents of the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense (B.P.R.D.) to places they'd never been.

Switching to a 75-minute format also gave Stones and his creative team the chance to execute the kind of complex visual sequences and background artwork rarely seen outside the best Japanese anime. One extended montage in *Blood and Iron* cuts between Hellboy and other B.P.R.D. agents as the forces of darkness seem poised to beat the good guys and unleash the forces of Hell on humanity. The scene is shot without dialogue and is accompanied by composer Christopher Drake's haunting rendition of the "Agnus Dei" (a latin term meaning "Lamb of God") hymn from the traditional Catholic mass – hardly the stuff of Saturday morning cartoons.

Stones and Mignola are especially proud of this scene, which would have been impossible to pull off in a 22-minute TV episode. Stones was impressed with the level of creative freedom they were given by the project's various backers.

"Everyone involved said, 'Just make Mike happy.' They trusted my experience and the fact that the creator was on board," says Stone, whose plan was always to stay true to Mignola's vision. "I don't consider them my movies because Mike is such a part of it. If Mike has a different idea for a sequence, I would defer to him because what I'm trying to do is capture the quirkiness of *Hellboy*, the unique world that is Mike's stories."

Stones wrote the storylines for the animated films with Mignola, then worked on the scripts with other writers. Mignola contributed throughout the writing process,





RON PERLMAN reveals both the pain and pleasures of playing the Seed of Destruction.

BEING HELLBOY

BY JAMES GRAINGER

How did you end up playing Hellboy?

My dear friend Guillermo del Toro, with whom I've now done three films [illegible] cionado. He dared to say that among all the things that inspired his pas- [illegible] the making of the *Hellboy* movie, he managed to get himself on the short list of directors. According to him, he always wanted me to play Hellboy. [illegible] fall in line with that idea.

the voice of Big Red in the animated movies and upcoming video game?

[illegible] grown to love the character so much that I jumped on board right away.

You know, I did. There is something about the pure ritual of transforming oneself, which took about four and a half hours to do with Hellboy, that [illegible] putting on makeup. We didn't have that step with the animated films, where we just walked into the studio and started recording the dialogue. [illegible] wiring, but it was a lot harder than I thought it would be because he is such a transformational being and the makeup is such a part of that.

Did you have any rituals to help you get into it?

You mean besides smoking a couple of joints? I'm just kidding – we don't [illegible] we all suspected. I didn't do anything too different from the other animated features I've worked on. I think the key to all performances, live or [illegible] flow through me.

[illegible] I didn't have a lot of input because there are too many time constraints with animation. You have to go into the recording studio and get it done in the time you have. There's a laconic quality on a film set, where you spend a huge amount of time sitting around waiting for things like light- [illegible] – though whether you have any real effect on the final film is a matter of debate.

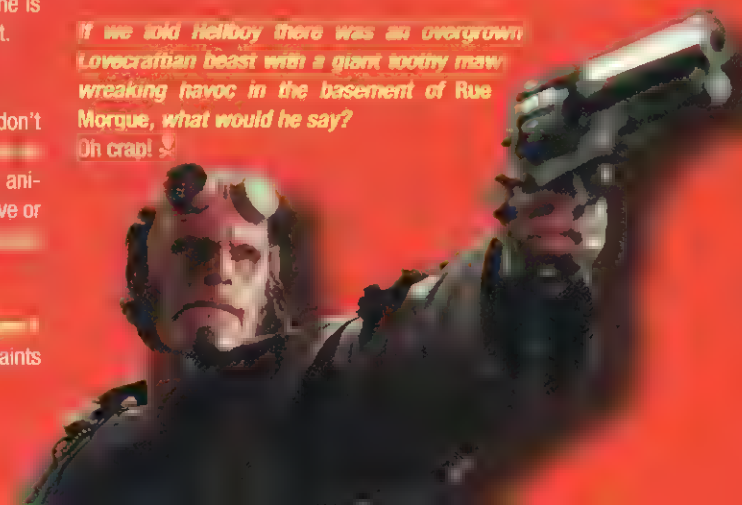
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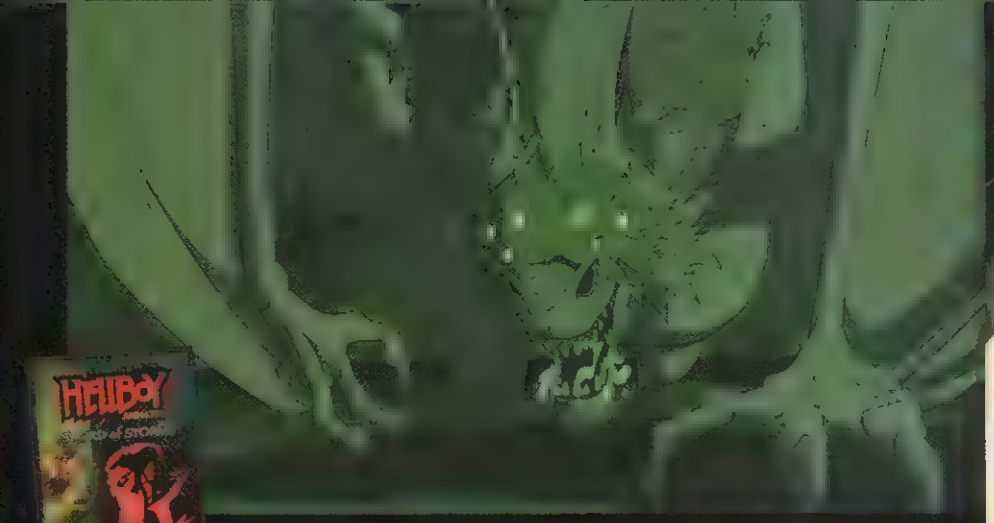
I haven't met too many of the younger fans, but the ones I have met love [illegible] ly 54-years-old but acts like he's fourteen. He's a real underachiever; he's [illegible] he's big and he's bad and he's on our side. There's nothing do-goodish about Hellboy either. He has an adolescent glee and enthusiasm about battling all those monsters. He wants to see how much pain he can take and how much it will take to bring this motherfucker down!

[illegible] the pre-production over in London.

If we told Hellboy there was an overgrown Lovecraftian beast with a giant toothy maw wreaking havoc in the basement of Rue Morgue, what would he say?

Oh crap!





A gargantuan bat goes head-to-head with Hellboy in **Sword of Storms** *and (below) the Greek goddess Hecate, who's often associated with ghosts and sorcery.*

giving Stones detailed notes and suggestions and even rewriting dialogue where he thought that Hellboy would say something differently. For his part, Mignola had no problem with letting other animators and writers run with his franchise, having already been through the process with the live-action film.

"It's much easier with animation and film to let the collaborators get the ball rolling and then create something brand new with them," Mignola says. "The original stories that I have made up are for the comics. For the animation and the film I've never once said, 'Here's a story I've always wanted to do, let's do it animated or live action.' My original ideas and storylines are precious to me and need to be done by me."



Outside the comics, though, Mignola says it's practically open season on Hellboy and the B.P.R.D. "When Tad came to me with the idea for doing Japanese mythology for *Sword of Storms* I stopped him right there and said, 'Yeah, let's do that.' I didn't have any plans to do any more Japanese folklore but I knew there was plenty of material to draw on and that we could create something entirely new."

The same holds true for the animation and graphic design for the films: "I was relieved that the studio didn't want the animated films to look like my stuff," Mignola admits. "I have a tough time watching people trying to imitate my style. Tad commissioned a bunch of animators to try out designs but I went for Sean Galloway: his stuff was the most extreme. It has a lot of bounce and exaggeration."

What hasn't changed is the granite-tinged vocal stylings of Ron Perlman, who returns to the franchise to voice Hellboy (see p.26). Also providing vocal continuity from del Toro's movie are Selma Blair as Liz Sherman and John Hurt as founding B.P.R.D. member Professor Broom. Hellboy confidante and B.P.R.D. consultant Professor Kate Corrigan makes her first appearance and is voiced by *Frasier*'s Peri Gilpin.

Though Stones has been given the green light to write a new script, no decision has been made on the fate of a third movie. This hasn't stopped Stones and Mignola from running wild with plans for *Hellboy*, however. The third feature, should it be made, will contain elements of Mignola's *Conqueror Worm* graphic novel and nods to Hellboy's shadowy origins. It will also pay homage to the Universal Studios monsters of the 1930s.

"The one thing I kick myself about," says Mignola, "is that I didn't realize until we were well into *Blood and Iron* that what we were really making was our version of a Hammer film. I've recognized real early that this new one is really a Universal monsters picture. If we go through with it, I want the designers to look at *Dracula* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, and design the movie around them." Stones is even more ambitious: "If we get the chance, every major event in the comics will happen in our movies – just under different circumstances."

TWISTED 'TOON



THE AMAZING SCREW-ON HEAD

Starring Paul Giamatti, David Hyde Pierce and Molly Shannon
Directed by Chris Prynoski
Written by Mike Mignola
Maple Pictures



Hellboy isn't the only Mike Mignola creation currently coming to life through animation. Based on Mignola's Eisner Award-winning one-shot comedic comic book of the same name, *The Amazing Screw-On Head* aired on the Sci-Fi Channel in July of last year. While awaiting news of whether it will become a series, Mignola fans can now pick up the half-hour pilot on DVD from Maple Pictures.

In the hilarious story, Abe Lincoln (Corey Burton) narrates that there are two histories: one that's told and one that isn't, and that the real history is chronicled only in a book called "The Adventures of the Amazing Screw-On Head" – which contains the special assignments of a special Civil War-era government agency

When an ancient manuscript belonging to a warlord named Gung is taken from the Office of Dangerous Books and Papers, along with the only man who can decipher it, Head is summoned to action. Voiced by Paul Giamatti, he's Lincoln's chief spy in occult matters, not to mention a talking steel head with a threaded neck that can be attached to different bodies.

Along with his eighth superhero butler, Mr. Groin, and his dog, Mr. Dog, Head pursues a particularly nasty but very articulate dead guy named Emperor Zombie (voiced by David Hyde Pierce of *Frasier*), who is aided by "two horrible old women and a monkey," along with his vampire girlfriend Patience (*SNL*'s Molly Shannon), who once dated Head when she was human.

In a hysterical finale, Zombie arrives at Gung's tomb and discovers a turnip with a parallel universe inside that houses an evil demigod. Head and company must then stop Zombie from opening the vegetable prison and "dispensing horror around the world."

Unlike *Hellboy Animated*, *Screw-On Head* is based on Mignola's distinctive chiaroscuro art, which is a pleasure to see in motion. Extremely well written and hilarious as hell, *Screw-On Head* is must-see viewing, and I sincerely hope it gets green-lit for a series. You reading this, Sci-Fi?

Jovanka Vuckovic



RUE MORGUE ASSEMBLES THE STORY OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL MONSTER COLLECTIBLES EVER MADE...

PAINT IT RED

THE HISTORY OF AURORA MONSTER MODELS

BY W. BRICE MCVICAR AND JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE RUTHERFORD AND RAY CASTILE

With an abundance of companies churning out collectible figures, busts, dioramas and more, there's no shortage of monster toys available to haunt any horror fan's home today. But in the late 1950s, as the monster movies of the '30s and '40s were peaking in popularity thanks to their revival on television, seekers of all things scary had few places to turn to find a monster all their own. Horror movies weren't supposed to be for children, after all, so toy companies had no interest in them. Of course, the kids were watching anyway, and quickly fell in love with the creatures of the Saturday morning matinee. Still, "monster kids" were left unsatiated.

All this changed in 1960, when a company known for producing models kits of cars, planes, ships, soldiers, knights and cowboys opened its idea banks to the public. The Aurora Plastic Company conducted a marketing survey that revealed a demand from young horror movie fans who yearned to buy their favourite classic monsters – with some exciting assembly required.

Survey results in hand, marketing director Bill Silverstein pitched the idea to Aurora president Abe Shikes. Though company officials were hesitant to launch a series of monster models, they gave in after psychological consultants deemed the building of the toys to be a healthy way for kids to deal with their fears. In 1961, Aurora created a mould for what would be the first in a long-running series of monster kits: Frankenstein.

Just as he had done for Universal back in the 1930s, Frankenstein's monster (standing atop a grassy grave inscribed with his maker's name) ushered in a new era of terror and delight when he hit store shelves. The impact of his arrival – despite his 1/8 scale size – was felt immediately as stores quickly sold out. So successful were the models that Aurora began working around the clock, producing 8000 of them each day to keep up with demand.

By 1966, monster model builders' shelves were lined with the creatures of classic cinema including Frankenstein, Dracula, The Wolf Man, The Creature, The Mummy, The Phantom of the Opera, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, King Kong, Godzilla, Salem Witch, The Bride of Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll as Mr. Hyde and The Forgotten Prisoner of Castle-Mare. The company had released the thirteen original monster models to the welcome hands of young builders who would coat them with generous amounts of red Testors paint, even though some of the kits kindly called for flesh colour.

Part of the kits' appeal came from the fact that each hobbyist (a would-be artist) could put his or her own creative touch on them, making modifications that suited the horror-loving imagination. Though the Universal monster films were black and white, kids looked to the gorgeously painted





colour box art by James Bama or their favourite issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* for Basil Gogos' take on a particular beastie for inspiration.

For example, Dracula, who came with bats that could be glued upside down, would often be done up with blood dripping from his mouth, even though he wasn't depicted that way on the packaging. (Hey, he's a vampire, isn't he?) The Phantom of the Opera came complete with a tortured soul imprisoned in a jail cell at his feet, who was frequently painted as though he had just been through a wood chipper. The company may have even noticed this trend, because by the time the Bride of Frankenstein kit came out, it had become more adventurous and released it with a human heart on a plate.

Thomas Graham, in his book *Aurora Model Kits*, says the kits were hugely successful not only because of the lack of monsters on the market but because the company cared about the product and had a keen eye for minutia. He points to sculptor Bill Lemon as the reason for their expert articulation and detail. Though not their chief sculptor, Lemon was considered Aurora's "number one man." He managed to capture the essence of the monsters in his moulds, making them come to life for the kids who would spend hours assembling and painting them.

Unfortunately, alarmed parents and a waning monster craze led to a decline in sales, which had Aurora phase out their monster kits in the late '60s. But, like all good monsters, the kits refused to die. Aurora re-issued the models with glow-in-the-dark parts in 1969, and again in 1972 (such as Godzilla, pictured p. 26) but they were never as successful as the originals.

In 1971, the company introduced a line called Monster Scenes, referred to as "the most gruesome toy ever made." These dioramas were highly detailed renderings of torture scenes but, with the compa-

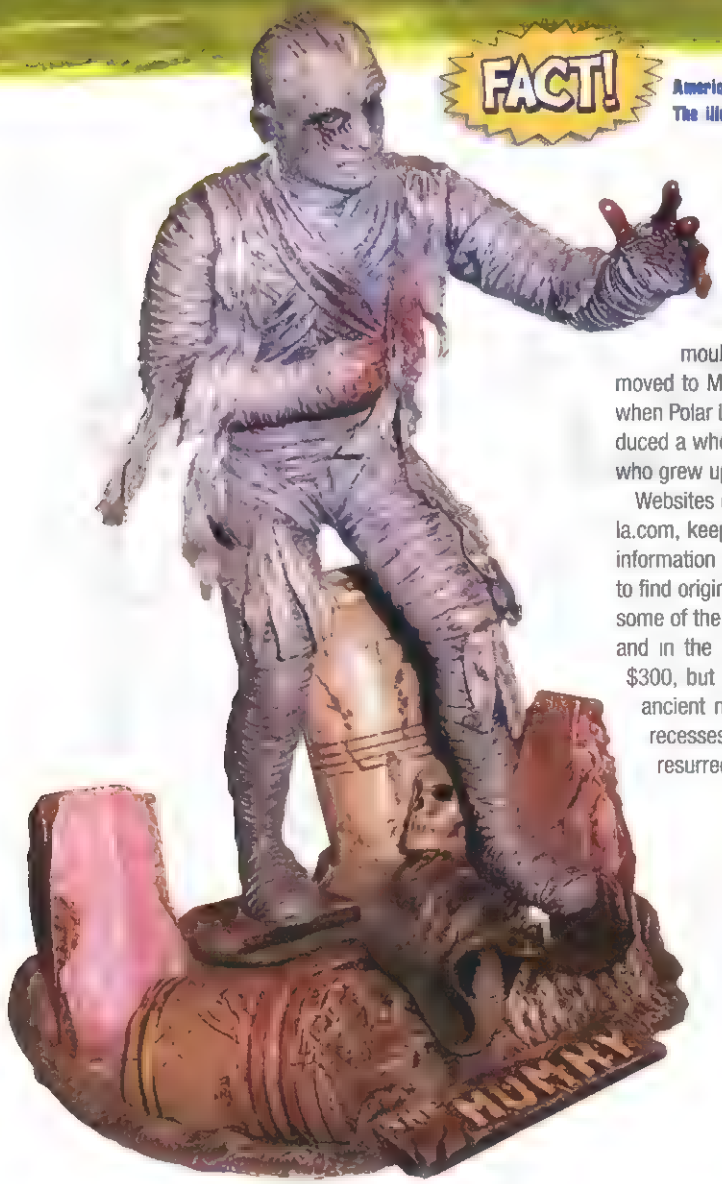


FACT! American realist painter James Bama illustrated all of the original Aurora monster model kit boxes. The illustrious boxes were half the appeal for collectors.

ny having been recently purchased by family-friendly Nabisco, production of the kits was stopped. Aurora once again resurrected the classic monsters in the middle of the decade with a line called Monsters of the Movies, but with competition from companies producing pre-painted action figures, they returned dim sales.

In 1977, Aurora was finally put to rest. Competitor Monogram purchased the moulds for Aurora's line but these were damaged in a train derailment when being moved to Monogram's Illinois offices. The monsters would not return until ten years later when Polar Lights began to reproduce of the classic kits. These reproductions not only introduced a whole new generation to the nostalgic models but also reignited a flame for those who grew up with the originals.

Websites dedicated to monster models, such as houseofdracula.com, keep the spirit of these plastic wonders alive, offering information about the kits, how to assemble them and where to find originals. A simple search on eBay can usually turn up some of the original kits for sale. Those still in mint condition and in the original packaging carry a price tag of around $300, but if you're a keen hunter, you may just find the ancient monster you're looking for lurking in the dark recesses of a hobby store near you – waiting to be resurrected.






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BILLY CONNOLLY
DAN BAKER
KEN RAY
HENRY CZERNY
TIM NELSON
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-AINT IT COOL NEWS
★★★★
Chris Knight, THE NATIONAL POST
"...a funny, vibrant, colourful, bloody good time... a perfect zombie movie..."
bloodydisgusting.com
FIDO
Laugh your head off
CHUM
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SOUNDING SOMETHING LIKE THE TEXAS-FRIED, MARIACHI MACABRE COUSIN TO GOTHABILLY, GHOULTOWN HAS LEFT A UNIQUE BRAND ON HORROR-THEMED MUSIC. RUE MORGUE TIPS ITS HAT TO THE UNDEAD MAN BEHIND IT ALL, COUNT LYLE.

THE MAYOR OF Ghoultown

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

He sings like a cowboy, looks like an outlaw and writes songs that would do the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse proud. When you get right down to it, though, Count Lyle – front man for Texan country/punk/metal horror hybrid band Ghoultown – is more of a pioneer than anything.

It's no dirty secret that roots music is anchored in darkness, from Robert Johnson's Devil at the crossroads, to the deathly iconography of The Man in Black, to a long and thriving history of murder ballads, but it was Lyle who consciously brought those dark undercurrents to the surface and turned them into a very specific *style* when he formed Ghoultown. The band, whose current membership includes Jake Middlefinger on lead guitar, Lizard Lazario on acoustic guitar, the singularly named Santi on bass and Dalton Black on drums, carves that niche with black, skull-adorned western wear, perfectly ghoulish album covers and lyrics exploring the violent, the bloody and the supernatural – not to mention some ferocious horror-punk attitude and downright evil metal riffs grafted to acoustic twang (sometimes even a mariachi horn section).

Lyle, whose resume also includes playing with punk legend GG Allin, straight-up horror-punk band The Killcreeps and doom-metal outfit Solitude Aeturnus, formed Ghoultown in 1999. After releasing the *Boots of Hell* EP that year, the group recorded its full-length debut, *From the Dead West* (2000, *RM#27*), followed it up with *Give 'Em More Rope* (2002) and the two-disc *Live From Texas!* album (2004). In 2005 the band went on hiatus, but before rigor mortis set in, most of the players reformed as Maltoro. After recording several songs, Lyle and company realized they were basically writing another Ghoultown album, so they reformed, signed to Zoviet Records, and late last year released *Bury Them Deep*, a collection of songs including "Blood on my Hands," "Tekilla" and "Walking Through the Desert (With a Crow)."

Although a near-death experience nearly ended it all, Lyle tells *Rue Morgue* what it is that keeps the band riding hard through the Valley of Death, and what it means to be the driving force behind the growing subgenre of terror twang.

You've played several different styles of music over the years. Why settle on Ghoultown?

Since I'm into so many types of music from punk to old country to metal, I feel like I can get away with infusing Ghoultown with all of these elements and still have it work. Given that the Old West had a big element of horror and death, it's easy to make the connection between horror punk and western. Fusing country and metal is a bit more of a stretch, but I also think it comes from a Texas-proud attitude, blending the rough edge of traditional cowboy life with the drive of rock and metal music. Also, with Ghoultown, it's the one-of-a-kind type band that I was always searching for – something that has its own identity, recognizable like when you think of The Misfits or KISS or whatever. I like knowing that whether people like the band or not, at the very least we stand out.

Has the Ghoultown sound changed on* Bury Them Deep*?

Songwise, it has the usual assortment of hard-driving cowpunk, spooky western and mariachi-influenced tunes, which I think are some of our best yet. But if you compare *Bury Them Deep* to



"WE SING A LOT ABOUT HORROR, BUT YOU REALLY NEVER KNOW TRUE HORROR 'TIL YOU'RE LYING ON THE FLOOR CHOKING TO DEATH."

COUNT LYLE

all of our releases since *Boots of Hell* in '99, I think you'll find that the band has steadily become heavier in both sound and approach.

There are millions of psychobilly bands and billions of horror-punk bands, but why so few horror-country bands?

I think most bands just wanna start something simple and rock with it. Breaking ground with something like Ghoultown is not easy. The horror punk scene is filled with Misfits copy bands and that seems to be the norm. I'm not putting these bands down; I love The Misfits, and in my earlier days I probably sounded more like them as well. But for me, I must strive to create my own thing. What if The Misfits just settled for sounding like contemporary punk bands when they started? If so, maybe they would have just been a second-rate Damned or something.

That said, there are more country-fied horror bands appearing – the Wednesday 13 side project Bourbon Crow, for example. Is terror twang taking off?

When Ghoultown started in '99, we literally had to hunt down vintage black western shirts and modify them with studs and skulls or whatever, or search all the way down to Mexico to find a cool black leather hat. Now I walk into Hot Topic and there's western-influenced fashions all over the place. Hell, I saw a black straw hat at Target with a freaking skull on it! … I think Hank III has had a huge impact on making dark cowboy culture cool with his professed love of The Misfits and true country music heritage. With his high profile, he helped meld these two things together, as I suppose Ghoultown has done in our own small way. I don't know if so-called terror twang will become a subgenre and take off, and I don't even know how I would feel about it.

About that hiatus…

Basically, we decided to take a break from Ghoultown due to business stress. We posted news on our site explaining that after five years of literally doing everything ourselves… running our own label, booking the tours, filling online orders, writing, recording, negotiating deals for comic books, movie soundtrack appearances, and on and on, we were nearly half-dead, which despite our gruesome overtone isn't the goal.

If you needed a break, why form Maltoro?

Maltoro had no set musical expectations or CDs to support; we could just play gigs for the fun of it. We also wanted to experiment a little with our music, which we didn't feel comfortable about doing under the Ghoultown name.

Part of this decision to take a break was also based on medical problems related to singing, correct? What happened?

Before we started the new project, I had to have some surgery on my esophagus because it was getting more and more difficult to swallow food. They said it may have been caused by singing all these years, but I'm not sure if I totally believe that. There are a few other reasons that can cause it as well, but everyone will be glad to know that tequila drinking was not one of them! Anyway, one night while eating some steak tacos, I found out that I had reached the end of the line and no more solid food was gonna go down. I laid on the floor at home choking for two hours before I finally ended up in the emergency room. After some X-rays and shots of nitroglycerin, I finally swallowed that bite of food seven hours later. I went in for corrective surgery shortly thereafter.

What went through your mind?

We sing a lot about horror, but you really never know true horror 'til you're lying on the floor choking to death. Seriously, all I kept thinking was, "please don't let me die like the singer of the Mommas and Papas." It didn't seem fitting for "Count Lyle." I should die in a gunfight or something, right?

Did you write about it on* Bury Them Deep*? "Revolucion," for example, seems like it echoes a near-death experience.

I never consciously wrote a song about my near-death experience, but I see how that could be interpreted in a lot of the songs on this CD. Maybe it's more of a subconscious contributor. "Revolucion" is actually about the "near-death" of Ghoultown. When I wrote it, I felt I was facing some unknown future beyond Ghoultown, and to me that represented a revolution in my own small world.

When you make death-themed art, what happens when you have a genuine near-death experience? Was there a perspective shift?

I've personally known several people who have had similar experiences and as a result, swing in the opposite direction, such as joining a religion or whatever. But for me, the near-death experience – which sounds a bit overdramatic to me, even though I really could have died – just seemed to affirm my dedication to my art. If I'm to explore horror and sort of laugh at death, I better be ready to get a taste of it without freaking out. It mainly made me realize that I should enjoy the things I like as much as possible – even if that's horror movies and music – or else tomorrow they might be gone.

So, Ghoultown's here to stay?

I can definitely say now that Ghoultown will run through my veins until the day I do finally choke on my last steak taco.

MASTERS OF HORROR CREATOR **MICK GARRIS** UNLEASHES HIS FIRST NOVEL, **DEVELOPMENT HELL**, A MIXED BAG OF GENRE TRICKS INSPIRED BY TINSELTOWN'S FICKLE FILM BUSINESS.

HOLLYWOOD HAD IT COMING

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

An arrogant, self-absorbed filmmaker attempts to jump-start his stalled career by exploiting a grey-skinned, fish-faced freak baby, which in turn exploits him for his various bodily excretions. Fed up, he destroys the beast, spends $100,000 to procure himself a night of passion (almost) with the late Jean Harlow, directs a Full Moon cheapie for Charles Band in Romania and commits suicide on a reality TV show only to find himself drifting around Hollywood in search of another body to inhabit. That's just the first three chapters of *Development Hell* – then it gets weird.

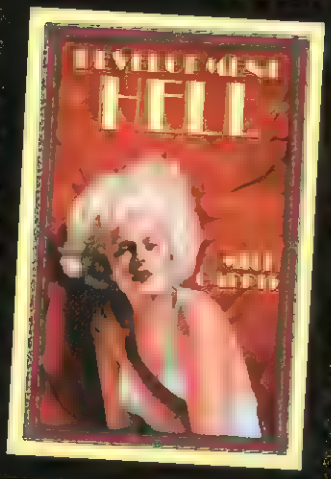
Equal parts allegory, ghost story, thriller, love letter, hate mail and black, black satire, Mick Garris' first novel (now available in hardcover from Cemetery Dance) is just over 300 pages and delivers on the lofty promise of his startlingly original and subversive 1999 short story collection *A Life in the Cinema*. Garris' daring tales blindsided many critics who had dismissed his early films (*Psycho IV: The Beginning*, *Sleepwalkers*) as lightweight and safe.

"My fiction is kind of a reaction against all the strictures of filmmaking," explains Garris from his Los Angeles office. "You don't have to deal with the studio or movie star egos or a budget or visual effects that may suck. In fiction you don't think of anything but you and the reader."

Development Hell's evolution was as unconventional as its subject matter, gradually morphing to full-length from two short stories with a common protagonist.

"'A Life in the Cinema' [the story which supplied the collection's title] had quite a life of its own in a number of anthologies," says Garris, "and I really liked the lead character, but it was twelve years later that I wrote 'Starfucker' (the aforementioned Jean Harlow episode) as a stand-alone short story. I thought they would be good bookends for a collection. But then I decided to write a third one that picked up where the second left off, and after that was done, Stephen King read it and said, 'You know, it's like you're writing a loose novel here.' And – BOOIINNGG! – the light bulb went on!"

Caustically narrated by Garris' nameless anti-hero, *Development Hell* chronicles a downward spiral that begins in this world's Hollywood, then details the character's misadventures as a disembodied spirit in a parallel Hollywood populated by the ghosts of the famous, and eventually follows him back to living, breathing Tinseltown where he takes up residence – with dubious success – in the bodies of various fictitious A-listers.



Fast-paced, descriptive and acerbic, the style invokes that of Joe R. Lansdale (if Lansdale grew up in LA instead of Texas). Garris cites the fickleness and chicanery of the film business as his inspiration.

"It's like girding your loins because it is all up and down," he laments. "*The Stand* was huge – the most successful miniseries ever – and I didn't direct anything for three years after that. The things that were available to me were really shitty or just things I couldn't get into, and the ones I wanted, no one would give me a shot [at]."

Garris pauses here to take stock of both the current state of horror cinema and his place in it: "I'm not doing $100 million studio pictures, and that's not entirely by choice," he admits. "I think there *are* good big studio movies but they're few and far between. The things I write myself at this stage don't fit that big CGI and action genre. I like a story with my blood, and there's not a whole lot of those being made."

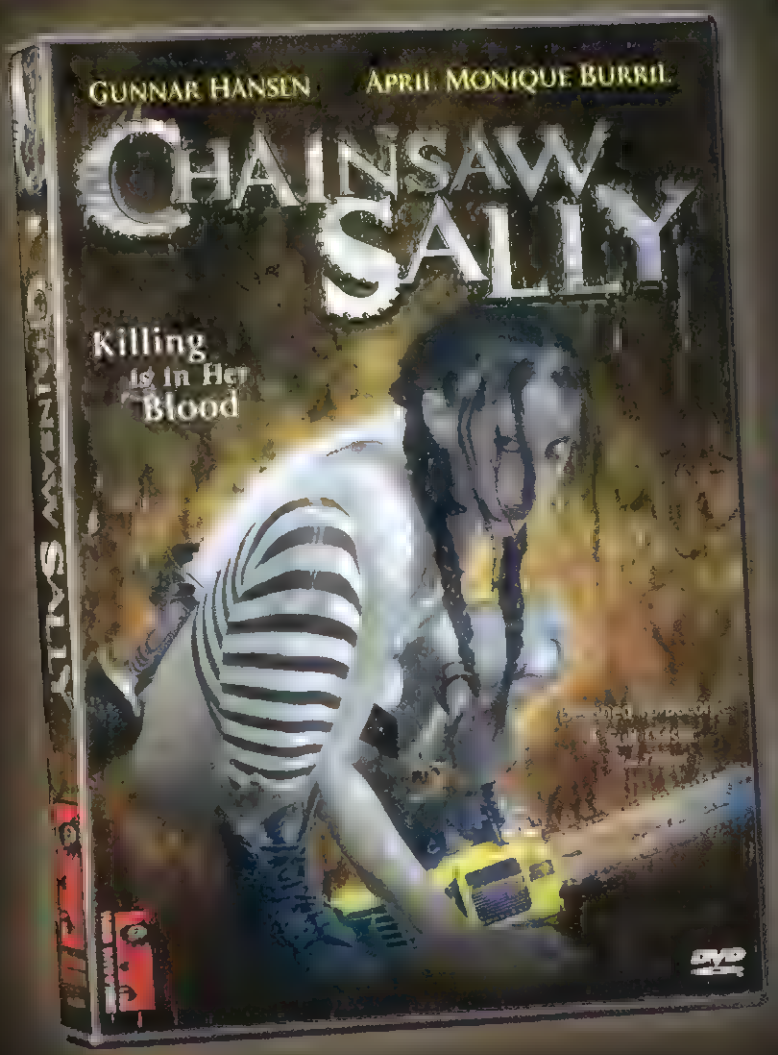
When prodded about the real celebrities who make fictitious cameos in *Development Hell* – and whose bad behaviour in the novel rings as true as anything in *Entertainment Weekly* – Garris isn't worried about ruffling feathers. To name but a few, Garris takes Colin Farrell to task for being an obnoxious, drunken lech, Renny Harlin for being a hack, James Cameron for being a foul-tempered tyrant and Bob and Harvey Weinstein for, well, just generally being the Weinsteins.

Not content with merely being the busiest man in horror cinema, Garris has his sights set writing another novel based on a script from an unmade film project he conceived of years ago, called *Jimmy Miracle*.

"It's actually not a horror novel," he reveals. "It's about a brain-damaged child in the 1930s US dust bowl with certain unusual abilities who goes on the road as the Voice of God. It's about evangelism, sexual repression and purity. I hope I get around to making a novel of it."

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HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS

("Two Thousand Maniacs," "Blood Feast")

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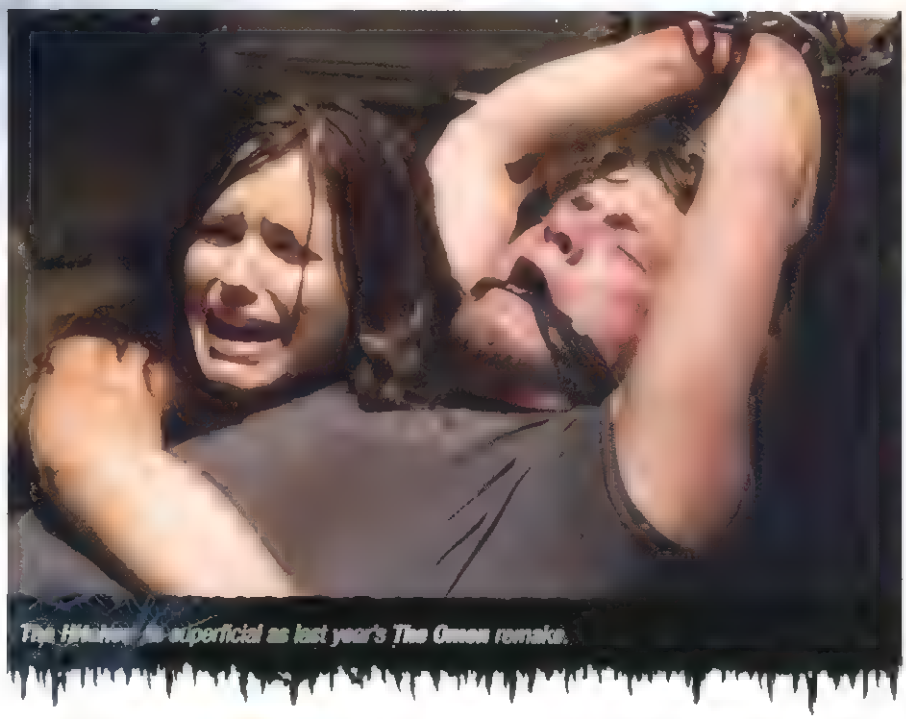
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CINEMACABRE



The Hitcher is superficial as last year's *The Omen* remake.

THUMB DOWN

THE HITCHER

Starring Sean Bean, Sophia Bush and Zachary Knighton
Directed by Dave Meyers
Written by Eric Bernt
Rogue Pictures

The recent crop of Hollywood horror remakes has yielded few if any positive results, but the truth is that it doesn't have to be that way. Though the original 1986 version of *The Hitcher* provided stylish, violent thrills and a decent good vs. evil struggle, it is also now very much outdated, mired in '80s fromage and filled with plot holes and foolish characters acting illogically. It certainly wouldn't be impossible to improve on the original, but Dave Meyers' brain-dead remake actually ends up doing much worse by ramping up everything that was bad to begin with.

The remake closely follows the story of the original, in which a young man and woman (C. Thomas Howell and Jennifer Jason Leigh) are stalked by a merciless and seemingly invincible hitchhiker named John Ryder (the always imposing Rutger Hauer) along a stretch of desert highway. While the actors in the new version do an adequate job with what they're given (especially Sean Bean as the dark and brooding Ryder), it's hard to take their situation seriously when the action is so incredibly dumb. Can we really believe that a couple barely out of their teens pose a bigger threat to Ryder than an army of cops? Somehow Ryder manages to be everywhere at once, not unlike some masked killer from an '80s slasher, and in the movie's greatest moment of unintentional hilarity, he appears out of nowhere to blow up several police cruisers and a friggin' helicopter.

It's the same sort of nonsense that plagued the original, yet that film had a method to its madness, with Hauer's villain serving as an evil mirror image to Howell's character, and a story that worked on perhaps a more metaphorical level, as opposed to being a straight thriller. This time, all we have are rehashed scenes patched together in a pointless, emotionless mess.

The Hitcher is yet another failed horror remake, as superficial as last year's *The Omen*. Whether you loved or hated the original *Hitcher*, you'll want to ditch this ride completely.

Aaron Von Lupton

LIKE, WEREWOLVES 'N' STUFF

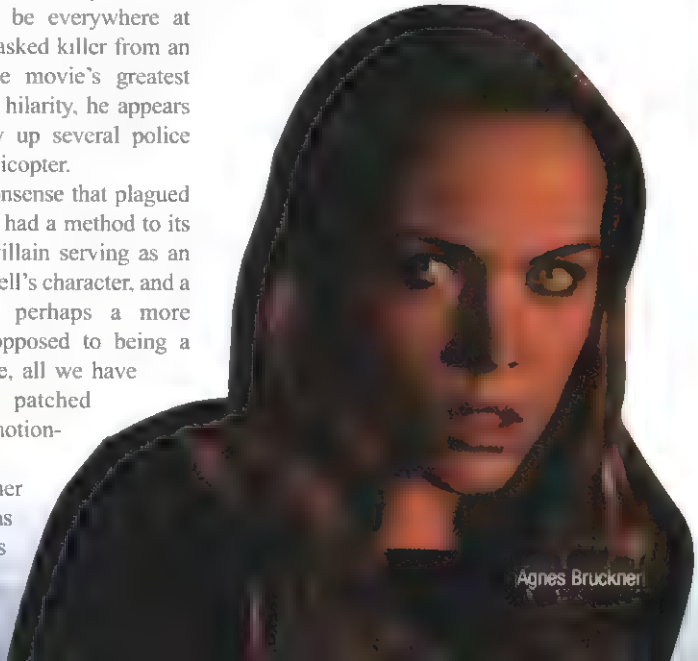
BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE

Starring Agnes Bruckner, Hugh Dancy and Olivier Martinez
Directed by Katja von Garnier
Written by Ehren Kruger and Christopher Landon
MGM

It would be easy to dismiss *Blood and Chocolate* as entirely disposable, but that would be the wrong approach to reviewing it. Why? Because, quite frankly, you and I aren't the intended audience.

Sure, it's a movie about werewolves, and yes, there are some maulings and bloodshed, but those things do not necessarily a horror movie make. To that end, the first thing one must recognize is that *Blood and Chocolate* was loosely adapted from a young adult novel aimed at teen girls. So it would be a stretch for the screen version to be anything but a PG-13 affair dealing in issues interesting to the intended demographic, which in this case has been watered down to cute, half-nekkid wolf boys and forbidden romance. Still, it could have been done better, and with more heart.

Blood and Chocolate is the story of a nine-



Agnes Bruckner

teen-year-old werewolf named Vivian (Agnes Bruckner), whose family was viciously slaughtered when she was a child. Raised by her aunt, also a werewolf, Vivian has a rather daunting prophecy perched over her head: she is expected to be the next "wife" to the leader of the pack. Only Vivian is headstrong, independent and not as interested in pack politics as she's expected to be. When she falls in love with a human (played by Hugh Dancy), it only complicates things leading to death, disobedience and more death

These deaths, while violent, lean towards the gore-free, and the whole plot comes off as vapid, superficial and occasionally laughable, despite the obvious and applaudable attempt to put some historical weight behind it. All of this makes *Blood and Chocolate* ultimately nothing more than a teen romance with werewolves, played out against a stunning Romanian backdrop.

While props do have to be given to the filmmakers for tackling a genre project for teens that sidesteps the usual slasher/J-horror fare, and for their use of real wolves instead of cheesy CGI counterparts, the lacklustre result will only be forgivable to tween-age girls and fans of supernatural romance, Harlequin-style. Disappointing.

Monica S. Kuebler

FALSE ADVERTISING

PRIMEVAL

Starring Dominic Purcell, Brooke Langton and Jürgen Prochnow
Directed by Michael Katleman
Written by John D. Brancato and Michael Ferris
Hollywood Pictures

Where to begin with this one? The deliberately misleading ad campaign that tried to pitch this giant man-eating crocodile movie as a serial killer flick? The staggeringly bone-headed waste of Orlando Jones, cast as the "hilarious black sidekick" in a movie set in fucking Africa, ranting in support of slavery? Or the lousy computer animation that makes Gustave the croc seem about as real (and as scary) as Shrek?

Primeval is the worst kind of horror movie, dishonest and ashamed of itself, displaying open, hateful contempt for its core audience. That audience ought to be genuinely offended, not just as filmgoers but as human beings. Unfortunately, on a basic filmcraft level, *Primeval* is such a listless and tedious experience that you'll barely be able to work up the bile while dozing off.



Dominic Purcell (right) takes a regrettable detour from ***Prison Break*** *to star in* ***Primeval****!*

See, rather than just being the best damn killer crocodile movie it can be (and let's face it, there aren't that many), it forcefully shoves its own raison d'etre as far into the background as possible and instead tries to hit us over the head with an urgent message about tribal genocide in Africa, wrapped in a ludicrous plot where American journalists mount an expedition to capture the near-mythical beast.

It's in its dumbfounding mixed messages that *Primeval* goes from just bad to morally and intellectually abhorrent. It's a giant man-eating croc movie advertised as a serial killer flick that wants us to believe that it's actually *Hotel Rwanda*. Except that what it's really doing is using a current and very real tragedy to add weight to a third-rate popcorn movie. This is a film that asks its audience to be horrified as a family is hacked up with a machete, then cheer when one man is torn in half in slow motion and another's head is squashed like a grape. It's as mystifying as it is infuriating.

Who knows what the makers of *Primeval* think their croc movie is really about. I am sure *I* know what it's about, though about 90 minutes too long.

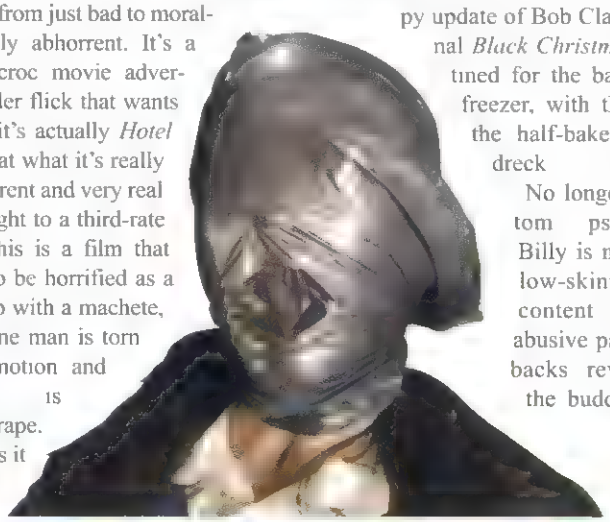
Joseph O'Brien

WORST REMAKE YET?

BLACK CHRISTMAS

Starring Michelle Trachtenberg, Lacey Chabert and Andrea Martin
Written and directed by Glen Morgan
TVA Films

Staler than grandma's fruitcake, writer/director Glen Morgan's sloppy update of Bob Clark's seminal *Black Christmas* is destined for the back of the freezer, with the rest of the half-baked holiday dreck



No longer a phantom psychopath, Billy is now a yellow-skinned malcontent with an abusive past. Flashbacks reveal how the budding killer





PRENATAL NASTINESS

PRO-LIFE

Starring Ron Perlman, Caitlin Wachs and Bill Dow
Directed by John Carpenter
Written by Drew McWeeny and Scott Swan
Anchor Bay



Ever get the feeling *Masters of Horror* is kinda like therapy for some of its veteran filmmakers? Case in point: John Carpenter. After dropping creative trou' and squeezing out *Escape From L.A.*, *Vampires* and *Ghosts of Mars* over the course of a decade, he seemed, well… done. But given free rein with his *MoH* episode, "Cigarette Burns," he made one of the more original entries in the series. It's not perfect, but it's still his best work in years, and feels more carefully crafted than cranked out of the old genre machine.

His second season episode, "Pro-Life," sees the filmmaker back in familiar territory, with a siege story. When abortion clinic workers nearly run over a fifteen-year-old girl (Caitlin Wachs), they bring her back to their gated facility and discover she's pregnant with something growing at a phenomenal rate. She claims to have been raped by a demon and wants the fetus aborted, but then her militant anti-abortion father (a seriously sinister Ron Perlman) arrives and demands her return. As she goes into labour, pop and his well-armed sons mount an attack. They cut the phone lines (conveniently, no one has a cellphone) and the siege is on.

"Pro-Life" isn't as controversial as promised (see *RM#59* for a behind-the-scenes look at the episode) or as horrifying as the premise suggests, but with some bloody gunplay, a disgusting *Thing*-inspired monster and an appearance from the giant demon daddy, it's loads of fun. The performances from the leads are strong, and one perfectly depraved scene has a vacuum aspiration pump turned on the abortion doctor (character actor Bill Dow). Drew McWeeny and Scott Swan's script makes the most of the setting, and although it doesn't represent Carpenter's most inspired direction (time and budget are obvious restraints), it suggests he's back on sure footing. Chicken soup for the scaremonger's soul, perhaps?

Dave Alexander

spent years locked in the attic after witnessing his deranged mother murder his dad, and then, on a subsequent Christmas Eve, how the troubled teen snapped and slaughtered his remaining family. Years later, Billy continues this holiday tradition by returning to his childhood home, now a sorority house. One by one, house mother Mrs. Mac (Andrea Martin, a carry-over from the original film) and a half-dozen interchangeable set decorations played by world-renowned thespians such as Lacey Chabert and Michelle Trachtenberg – disappear into the dark attic to get their trees trimmed.

Too bad these glossy college kids have zero personality, coming across as even more generic than the killer the film ironically spends so much time trying to establish. Morgan attempts to shoehorn *Final Destination*-style gore gags into an underdeveloped narrative that only barely acknowledges the original. Sure, a few familiar decorations are scattered around (glass unicorn, a peeping eye and threatening phone calls), but the characterizations and palpable tension that make the first film so unique are jettisoned in favour of brain-dead slasher antics. While undeniably gooey, *Black Christmas*' carnage is neither surprising nor fun, as victims are indifferently dispatched via ornaments, candy canes and killer icicles.

Robert McLachlan's cinematography is slick, but Morgan's submoronic script is a disgrace, and reported studio recuts haven't helped matters. Not only does *Black Christmas* (accidentally?) reveal that there's a second, mystery killer mere minutes in, but the film is plagued with countless plot holes, ineffective red herrings and a complete lack of scares as it clumsily unravels Billy's superfluous back story with such tired plot devices as a shoebox full of newspaper clippings.

It takes a special kind of holiday tragic to turn a remake of a definitive proto-slasher film into a particularly limp imitation of a late '80s *Halloween* knock-off. *Black Christmas* is not only the crappiest Christmas horror movie since *Silent Night, Deadly Night 2*, it may be the worst film of 2006.

Paul Corupe

BITCH THE RUBBER SUIT, MAN

ALTERED

Starring Adam Kaufman, Michael C. Williams and Brad William Hanke
Directed by Eduardo Sánchez
Written by Jamie Nash and Eduardo Sánchez
Rogue Pictures



Unless your alien horror movie has an *Alien*-sized budget, keep your martians on the down-low. Rubber suits are generally cheesy and CGI rarely works, stick to





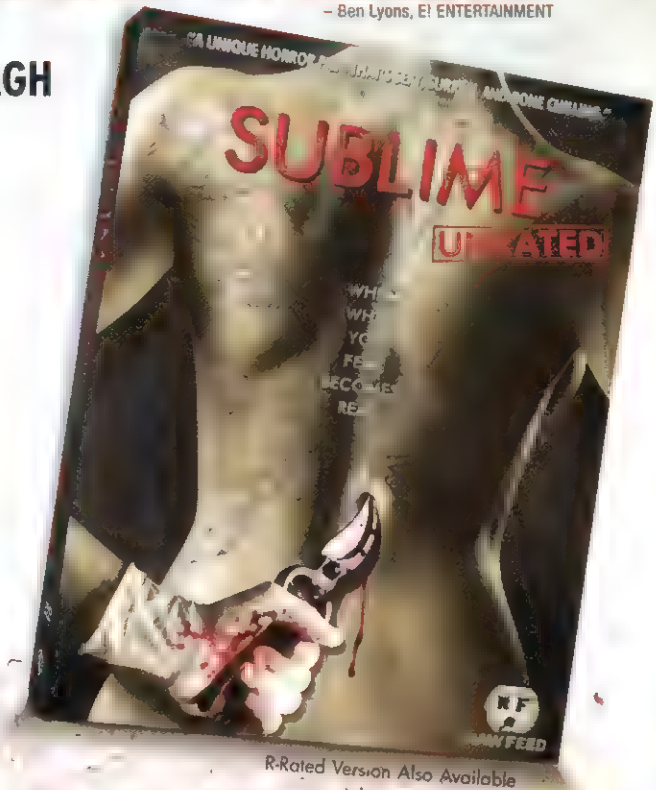
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– Ben Lyons, E! ENTERTAINMENT

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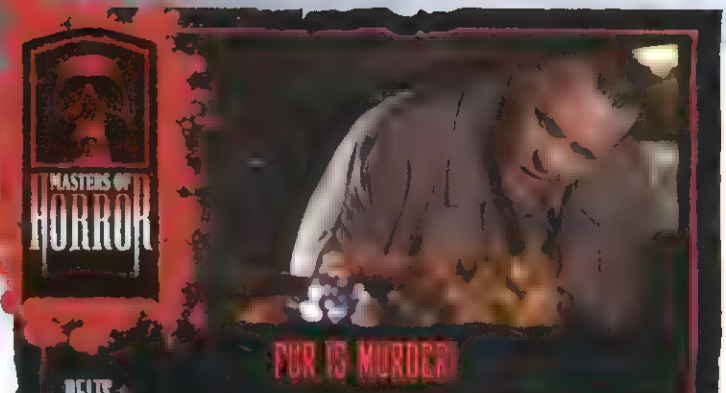
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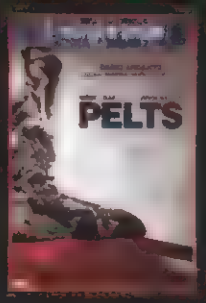
Bonus Materials Not Rated or Closed-Captioned CC

BEST BUY



PELTS

Starring Meat Loaf, Link Baker and Emilio Salituro
Directed by Dario Argento
Written by Matt Venne
Anchor Bay



The quality of Dario Argento's genre output has always been wildly uneven, with *Deep Red* and *Suspiria* among his best and *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Card Player* the worst. His first contribution to the *Masters of Horror* television series, "Jenifer," however, took viewers by surprise, signalling a strong comeback for the maestro of Italian horror. Alas, much like a pendulum invariably swings in the opposing direction, so must Argento's work.

Based on a story by F. Paul Wilson (*The Keep*), "Pelts" may be the most absurd entry in the *MoH* series to date, comparable to John Landis' ludicrous shape-shifting-themed "Deer Woman," except this time the menace is a killer coat... designed by Meat Loaf! Said portly rock musician turns in an uninspired performance as Jake, a pervy furrier hellbent on scoring a stripper named Shana (Ellen Ewusie) who has no interest in him or his obsessive desire to have anal sex with her.

Meanwhile, a fur trapper (John Saxon!) and his son poach mystical raccoons on private property owned by a cackling crone. The poachers make a call to Jake just before the son bashes his father's brains in, then forces his own face into an animal trap. A ton of ultra-violence follows, as everyone who comes in contact with the diabolic pelts is murdered in a creatively gory fashion. Eventually, Jake shows up at Shana's loft with a dazzling fur coat, she quickly lowers her standards and he finally gets it... in more ways than one.

Of course, there's a conspicuous social commentary in "Pelts" on the abuse of nature for profit, but for most forward-thinking people, it's effectively vitiated by misogynist nonsense that will make animal lovers rejoice and feminists recoil. That said, it's still worth seeing once, as there's nothing scarier than Meat Loaf with his shirt off.

Jovanka Vuckovic

first-hand accounts, second-hand bits of evidence and shadowy glimpses of the anal probe-happy bastards (case in point: *Fire in the Sky*). Eduardo Sánchez, one of the creators of the nano-budget *Blair Witch Project*, knows the value of less-is-more. On his first directorial effort since *BWP*, he stays the course… well, at least until the little green man from Mars appears.

Y'see, out in the backwoods of Bohunk, USA there are aliens on the prowl. Fifteen years earlier they abducted a handful of good old boys and did some nasty body and mind-altering stuff to 'em so nasty that one of them didn't return, and his brother Wyatt was blamed for the mysterious disappearance. Now, Wyatt (Adam Kaufman) lives like a shut-in in his woodland shack, while the others (including one played by *BWP*'s Michael C. Williams) guzzle beer and try to catch an alien for some payback.

One night they snare one. Wrapped up, chained up and with a welder's mask on (so it can't use its mind powers), they bring it to Wyatt's place. It's pissed off, capable of spreading a flesh-melting virus and able to telepathically call in its kin. When it escapes, rednecks get hurt.

For a film with basically one location and one alien, Sánchez and screenwriter Jamie Nash do a good job building suspense and making the diminutive critter genuinely scary. At least until we get a good look at it – then it's a gnarly dwarf in a rubber suit that sometimes acts like an alien, sometimes like a gut-ripping monster, and at other times a slasher villain. The alien's true nature is vague, but not in a good way. The plot is also difficult to follow at points, with much-needed flashback sequences seemingly cut for budgetary reasons.

Sánchez proves he can handle a regular (non-mockumentary) horror film, but somebody give him a decent budget to work with. And ditch the rubber suit.

Dave Alexander

SLASH 'N' STALK DOC

GOING TO PIECES: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SLASHER FILM
Directed by Jeff McQueen
ThinkFilm

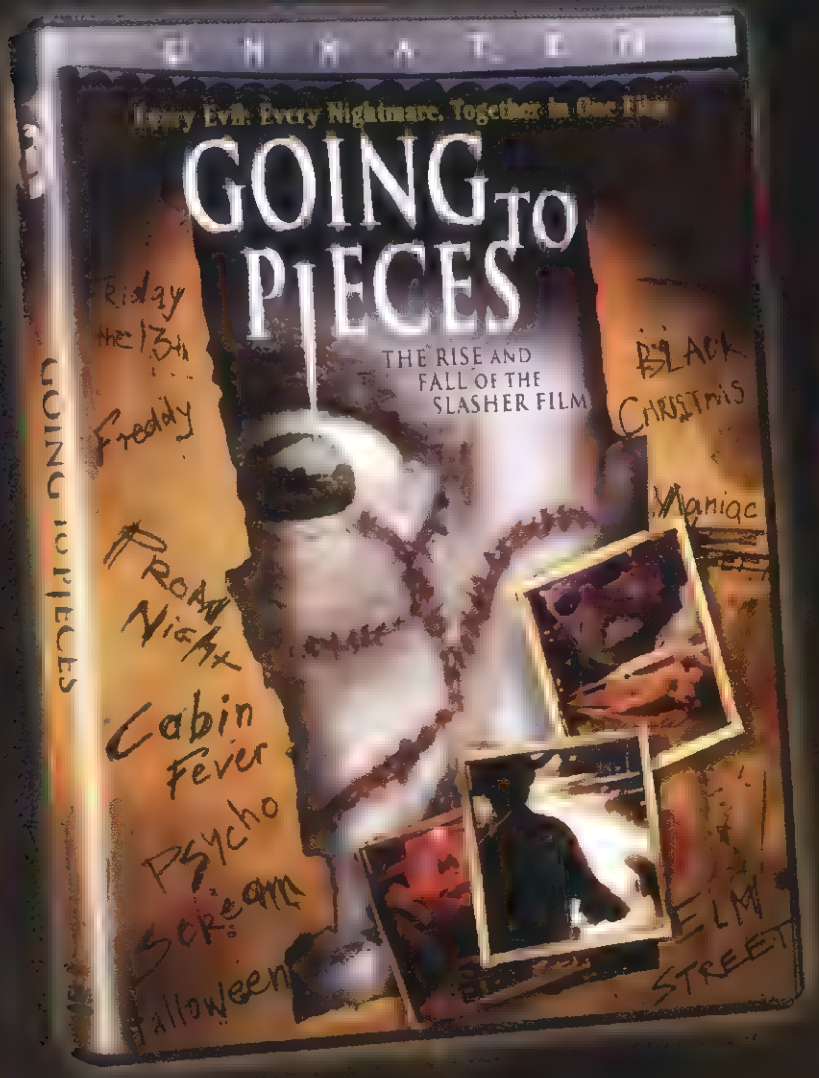


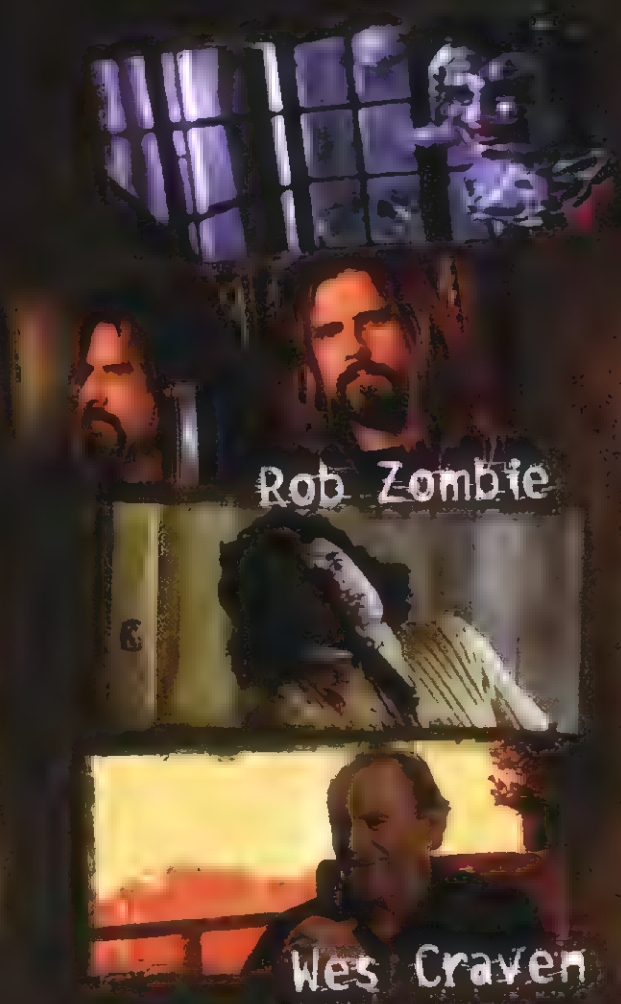
The slasher has been brutalized by film critics and even dismissed by many hardcore horror fans as clichéd garbage, and yet movies such as *Friday the 13th*, *The Burning* and even





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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE LOVES LEROY

EIGHT LEGS, NO WAITING



CREEPIES 2

Amsell Entertainment

Back in *RM#50* I had the pleasure to review *Creepies*, a quirky little creature feature loaded with imaginative miniature effects. Now, the spiders have returned in director Jeff Leroy's follow-up, *Creepies 2*, and this time the hungry arachnids are taking over Sin City. Tanks, jet fighters and even a secret government robot are called in to save the day. Meanwhile, a group of gamblers and an Elvis impersonator are trapped in one of the casinos, desperately trying to avoid becoming lunch. Leroy does wonders with the tiniest of budgets, this time building the Vegas strip in miniature, then blowing it all up! It makes one wonder what he could achieve if some Hollywood producer gave him half a chance with a big budget.

Body Count: 37

Best Death: Eviscerated Elvis

LUPINE LOCK-UP



WEREWOLF IN A WOMEN'S PRISON

Me Films

Leroy had me at "women's prison" but throwing in a werewolf sealed the deal. All hell breaks loose after horny campers suffer a mid-hump werewolf attack. With her boyfriend turned into tartar, Sarah manages to kill the beast, but not before getting bitten. The authorities don't buy her story and toss her in a jail that's more whorehouse than big house, subjecting her to a variety of pervy terrors – until the first full moon turns her into a vengeful werewolf. Leroy scores big with gory transformation effects and a first-rate nod to *An American Werewolf in London*, where the decomposing boyfriend pays a visit. With plenty of T&A, jail yard brawls, a sadistic dominatrix and grue by the gutload, you could certainly do worse.

Body Count: 23

Best Death: Inmate split by prison bars

BLACK MAGIC BABES



THE WITCH'S SABBATH

Brain Damage Films

Double-D, double-D, toil and trouble! In *Witch's Sabbath*, Leroy casts the luscious Syn DeVil (*Vampire Sisters*) as Auriana, a witch who heads a coven of hotties charged with delivering 666 souls a year to their demon lord. The witches also just happen to work as strippers (of course!), which comes in handy when luring horny customers back to their house. Not even door-to-door bible salesmen are safe, as demonstrated when Ron Jeremy's character is trapped by the vicious vixens and hilariously decapitated in a gruesome demonic ritual. Though the storyline is less than original, it still kicks ass with some spine-shattering, head-popping special effects, gratuitous T&A and a demon that has to be seen to be believed.

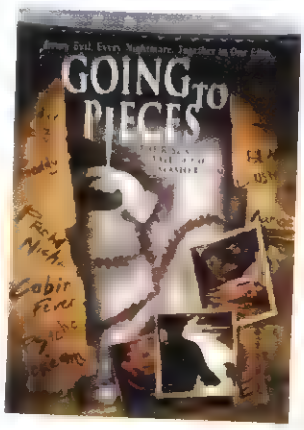
Body Count: 13

Best Death: Man beaten to death with his own arm

Last Chance Lance

Sleepaway Camp endure within certain circles. Based on the 2002 book of the same name by Adam Rockoff, *Going to Pieces* is a fairly comprehensive story of the slasher film, told by the actors, directors and effects artists responsible for this notorious, often ridiculous, yet addictive form of entertainment. You would think the subgenre has been covered to death by now, but this documentary keeps things fresh with insights from John Carpenter, Tom Savini, Felissa Rose (Angela from *Sleepaway Camp*) and many more, all of whom still seem proud of their work

Going to Pieces even traces the roots of the slasher to the bloody entertainment of the Colosseum and later the Grand Guignol theatre, leading into movies like *Psycho*, and culminating with *Halloween* as the first archetypal slasher. Curiously, *Black Christmas* is ignored completely, and the influence of Italian horror movies is only casually mentioned. A disproportionately long time is spent on the already extensively covered Carpenter classic, as well as the original *Friday the 13th*, but there's still a good chunk dedicated to less celebrated slashers *Happy Birthday to Me*, *My Bloody Valentine* and *The Prowler* – a real treat for old-schoolers.



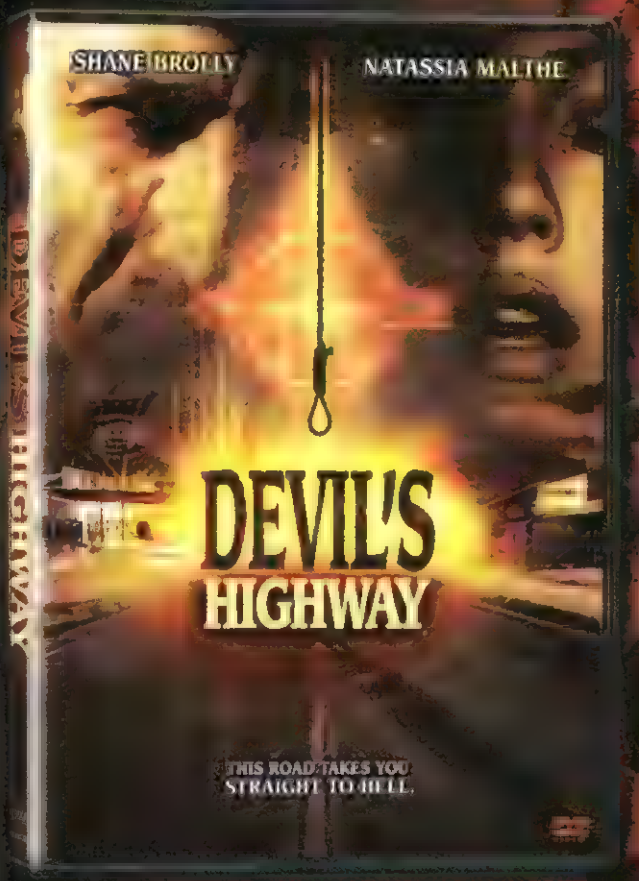
Other topics include the controversy sparked by the genre (scenes of parents protesting outside theatres showing *Silent Night, Deadly Night* are priceless), the harsh treatment it received from critics, including Siskel and Ebert, as well as the socio-political climate that fostered interest in such films. Here things become a tad overblown, since the craze probably had more to do with cashing in on the template set by *Halloween*/*Friday the 13th* than with Reaganomics, nuclear weapons or AIDS, as the documentary suggests.

Though *Going to Pieces* is ultimately geared toward slasher fans, it's an honest attempt to give some sort of intellectual framework for what makes this subgenre work, why some hate it and why it will always have a place in horror cinema.

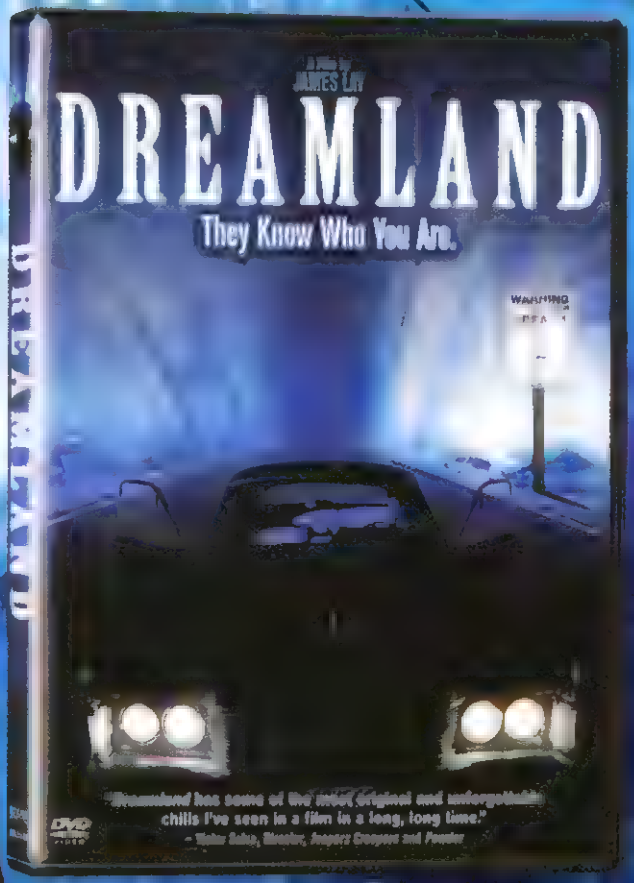
Aaron Von Lupton

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INDIE TERROR FEST!

REVIEWS OF STORE MODELS, PINK GORILLA AND LAST CHANCE LANCE

MERCY

patrickroddy.com



Anyone who willingly subjects himself to a large supply of DIY horror flicks will notice common mistakes that pop up from film to film. Ironically, these shortcomings have emerged as weird, stylistic conventions of the form itself. Right at the top of the list is one of the greatest fumbles of DIY horror: an abominable sense of pacing. Patrick Roddy's feature *Mercy* is no exception to this frequent pitfall. It is impossible to survive a screening of this flick without reaching for the fast-forward button. Despite the ponderous pacing, though, it boasts riches that cannot easily be dismissed. Actor Gary Shannon delivers a fantastic performance as John Mercy, a lonely, middle-aged man who gets out of jail after twenty years and is determined to set his life straight. He takes a job at a factory, moves into a cheap hotel and spends his long nights at a desperate bar across the street, haunted by startling, guilt-induced hallucinations of his horrendous criminal past. Dynamically shot in glorious black and white with a wonderfully sparse, dissonant piano and cello score that penetrates the film with morbid melancholy, *Mercy* is a bleak ride through existential torment that is irresistible to my miserable, Northern English sensibilities. **SA**

ACNE

neweyefilms.com



A cleverly eccentric horror-comedy from Chicago filmmaker Rusty Nails (whose current project is a George Romero documentary), *Acne* inhabits the nihilistic middle ground between *Night of the Living Dead* and bleak punk rock classics such as *Repo Man*. In the film, the evil bigwigs at Mershey's Chocolate contaminate New Jersey's drinking water supply, causing all the teens in the area to develop giant pimples on the tops of their heads. Popping out the pus, Franny (Tracey Hayes) and Zooey (Nails himself) wander through their suburban wasteland in a zombie-like stupor, trying to figure out just what went wrong. When chocolate sales in the area are banned after the zitheads are caught slathering greasy junk food on their now-craterous craniums, Franny and Zooey lead a pilgrimage to the Mershey factory to solve the mystery and satisfy their sugar jones – unless, of course, the army stops them first! This delirious black and white 16mm flick contains all the nods to classic horror and sci-fi cinema you might expect, but it's also a witty satire on corruption and big business set to the punk sounds of Dead Kennedys, Lunachicks and Alice Donut. Nicely shot and well acted, Nails' fascinating debut feature is almost as much fun as squeezing blackheads. **PC**

MY DEAD GIRLFRIEND

brettkelly.net



It's the same old love story gorehounds know and adore: boy meets girl, boy kills girl, boy reanimates girl, then they live happily ever after. *My Dead Girlfriend* is Ottawa filmmaker Brett (*The Feral Man*, *The Bonesetter*) Kelly's latest contribution to the world of independent horror, and he's splattered it with hilarity in the same vein as the *Evil Dead* movies. Kelly stars as Steve, a loser who accidentally (and hilariously) backs over his girlfriend, then attempts to revive her with an ancient spell. Things go horribly wrong, though, and she's resurrected as a hungry zombie who starts munching on just about anything she can wrap her teeth around. The movie is a little slow at first, but hits its comedic stride when Steve whisks Amy to a cottage hideaway. It gets even better when Steve's friends show up and he has to think fast as he tries to explain her strange anti-social behavior. *My Dead Girlfriend* is a goofy, thoroughly enjoyable romantic movie that remains true to its zombie horror roots, providing enough nasty flesh eating – and some impressive projectile vomiting – to please just about everyone. It's just like sticking a copy of *Romeo and Juliet* in a woodchipper. **LCL**



MARIO BAVA'S

KILL BABY KILL

"SCENE AFTER SCENE OF HALLUCINATORY INTENSITY."
-MONDO DIGITAL



In a remote Balkan village, the bodies of several townsfolk are discovered with gold coins embedded in their hearts. Arriving from the city, an investigating physician (The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave, Giacomo Rossi Stuart) and his beautiful assistant (Erika Blanc of The Devil's Nightmare) conclude that the dead are victims of suicide, and that the coins have been inserted postmortem as talismans to ward off evil.

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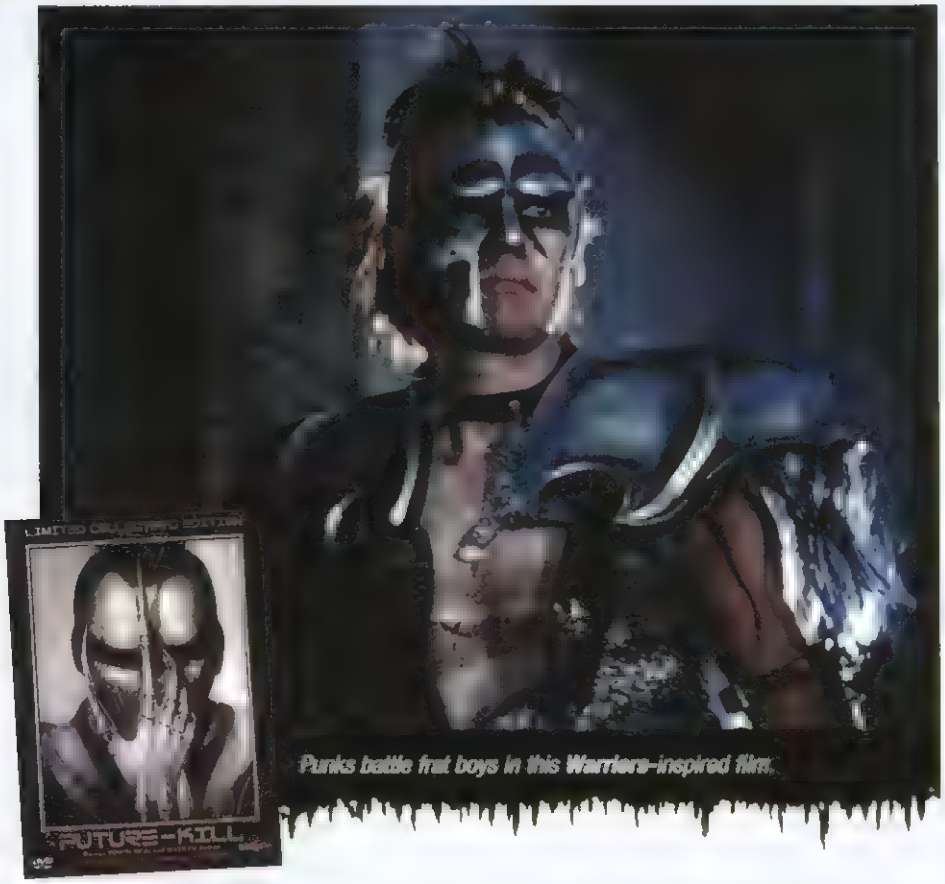
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REISSUES



Punks battle frat boys in this *Warriors*-inspired film.

WARRIORS, COME OUT AND SLAY

FUTURE-KILL (1985)

Starring Edwin Neal, Marilyn Burns and Gabriel Folse
Directed by Ronald W. Moore
Written by John Best, Kathleen M. Hagan, Ronald W. Moore, et al.
Subversive Cinema

Though few have watched it, nearly everyone recognizes the name *Future-Kill*, thanks to the movie's original H.R. Giger cover art, which could be seen in every video store during the 1980s. Those who have viewed the film either hate it for its pitifully low budget, immature humour and rip-off storyline, or they honour it as an unintentional triumph of bad moviemaking and, arguably, the definitive punk rock horror movie.

In the world of *Future-Kill*, the downtown city streets are ruled by a gang of political punks who call themselves the Mutants. Although they're basically a non-violent bunch, their leader Splatter (played by *TCM* alumnus Edwin Neal, who also co-wrote and co-produced) is an increasingly unstable psychopath who also happens to have suffered genuine nuclear mutation.



The story involves frat boys who, as punishment for one of their many pranks, are forced to go downtown and kidnap one of the Mutants. Things go wrong when Splatter splatters the boys, along with one of the punks' chief leaders, then blames it on the frats. What follows is an obvious riff on *The Warriors*, as the frats, disguised as punks, try to survive the night and make it back home while being hunted by Splatter and his cronies.

Future-Kill draws obvious influence from the early '80s punk scene, with the Mutants representing a militant, anti-establishment force fighting for a voice, while our frat heroes are too busy partying to care. Though the music is more dark synth and bad pop than punk, there's a nightclub scene that could have been lifted straight out of Penelope Spheeris' *Suburbia*.

Subversive Cinema delivers a widescreen transfer of the film (unbelievably pristine compared to the dark, grainy VHS versions), plus an entertaining commentary track by first- and last-time director Ronald W. Moore, as well as a sadly uninformative interview with Neal. Goofy, gritty and unoriginal yet hugely entertaining, *Future-Kill* is a splatterpunk cult classic.

Aaron Von Lupton

IT CAME FROM KAREN'S BACK!

THE MANITOU (1978)

Starring Tony Curtis, Susan Strasberg and Michael Ansara
Directed by William Girdler
Written by Jon Cedar, William Girdler and Thomas Pope
Anchor Bay

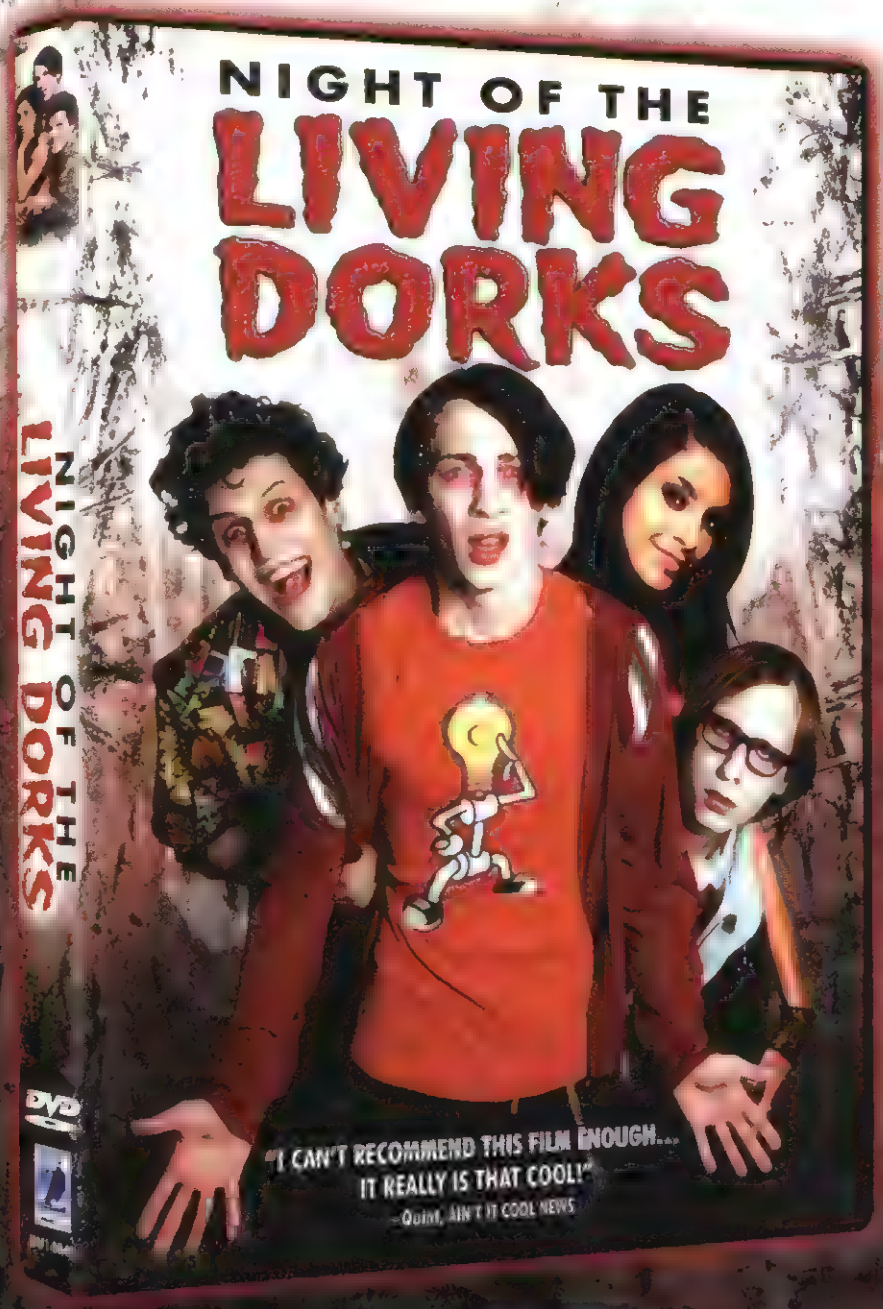
A heady mix of schlock and shock that's still too weird for most mainstream audiences, William Girdler's *The Manitou* has finally experienced a digital rebirth from the good folks at Anchor Bay. Based on Graham Masterton's best-selling novel about an evil Native American spirit seeking revenge for the injustices of the past, the effects-laden film isn't exactly a classic, but it still ranks as one of the strangest horror outings of its time.

Carefully building an encroaching sense of dread, the movie actually starts out as a bleak paranormal thriller similar to *The Entity* or *The Amityville Horror*, as Karen (Susan Strasberg) awakens one morning to discover a small lump on her back. Her tarot card-reading boyfriend Harry (Tony Curtis) seeks help from a scatterbrained anthropologist (Burgess Meredith), who believes the bulge is actually the fetus of Misquamacus, a 400-year-old Native American medicine man who can manipulate his Manitou – or eternal life

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The Manitou: *Karen (Susan Strasberg) plays host to a 400-year-old medicine man.*

spirit – to be physically reborn in a host body. As the tumour grows and Karen's life is further threatened, Harry contracts a contemporary shaman (Michael Ansara) to save her and prevent Misquamacus from destroying modern-day San Francisco.

Buoyed by cheap but memorable effects from Tom Burman (*My Bloody Valentine*, *Halloween III*, *The Goonies*), the film fluctuates wildly between genuine atmosphere and downright camp, struggling to maintain dignity through Curtis' smirking lead performance. It's no real surprise that the absurd story eventually dissolves into SFX silliness once the creepy, four-foot tall Misquamacus emerges from his fleshy cocoon.

After killing an orderly, the furious shaman sends out "giant" lizard demons, turns the hospital floor into an arctic wasteland and, in the outrageous climax, engages the heroes in a cosmic tag-team space battle along with his good buddy Satan.

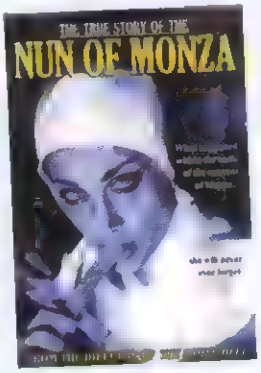
Girdler, who died in a helicopter crash before the film opened, made the most of his A-level cast to achieve a grade of technical accomplishment and polish missing from his previous efforts, even if it's never quite as entertaining as his real masterpiece, *Grizzly*. Despite this, *The Manitou* continues to be a curious, one-of-a-kind horror movie experience, as well as a must-see for Girdler fans.

Paul Corupe

BAD HABITS

THE TRUE STORY OF THE NUN OF MONZA (1980)

Starring Zora Kerova, Franco Garofalo and Leda Simonetti
Written and directed by Bruno Mattei
Exploitation Digital



Those who think the spotty work of Bruno Mattei is second only to Jess Franco (whom he actually studied under) will be surprised by the quality of his 1980 nunsploitation potboiler *The True Story of the Nun of Monza*.

The film does not plunder the director's standard depths of cinematic ineptitude (see: *Rats*) but is actually a grim, visually lush, dark sex film bursting with baroque visuals, blasphemous imagery, nun/priest orgies and graphic torture. It pulls no punches in its single-minded crusade to both titillate and shock.

Monza is the supposedly fact-based tale of titular twisted Sister Virginia de Leyva (Zora Kerova from Joe D'Amato's *Anthropophagus*) who has recently assumed the position of Mother Superior at her convent. Plagued by out-of-control hormones and sweaty dreams (in one she almost fellates Christ!), she's relentlessly pursued by a murderous Italian nobleman (Mario Cutini) who has been granted sanctuary within the holy house. When Sister Virginia finally relents to his savage charms, a wave of dissent, depravity and violent tragedy ensues. Meanwhile, almost the entire cast gets naked and nasty, while Gianni Marchetti's gothic synth music pounds away in the background.

Mattei (under the pseudonym Stefan Oblowsky) is best known on these shores as the hack behind the ridiculous *Dawn of the Dead* rip-off *Hell of the Living Dead*. His reputation as a serious genre filmmaker is dubious at best. But *Monza* is about as good as the controversial nunsploitation subgenre gets. This is hot, dangerous, engrossing and sumptuously vulgar stuff. A tip of the habit must go to Media Blasters who, under their Exploitation Digital banner, give this blasphemous epic a respectful anamorphic transfer in Italian with subtitles. Chiefly for tortured Catholics and naughty film collectors.

Chris Alexander

YOU BETTER WATCH OUT...

CHRISTMAS EVIL (1980)

Starring Brandon Maggart, Jeffrey DeMunn and Dianne Hull
Written and directed by Lewis Jackson
Synapse Films



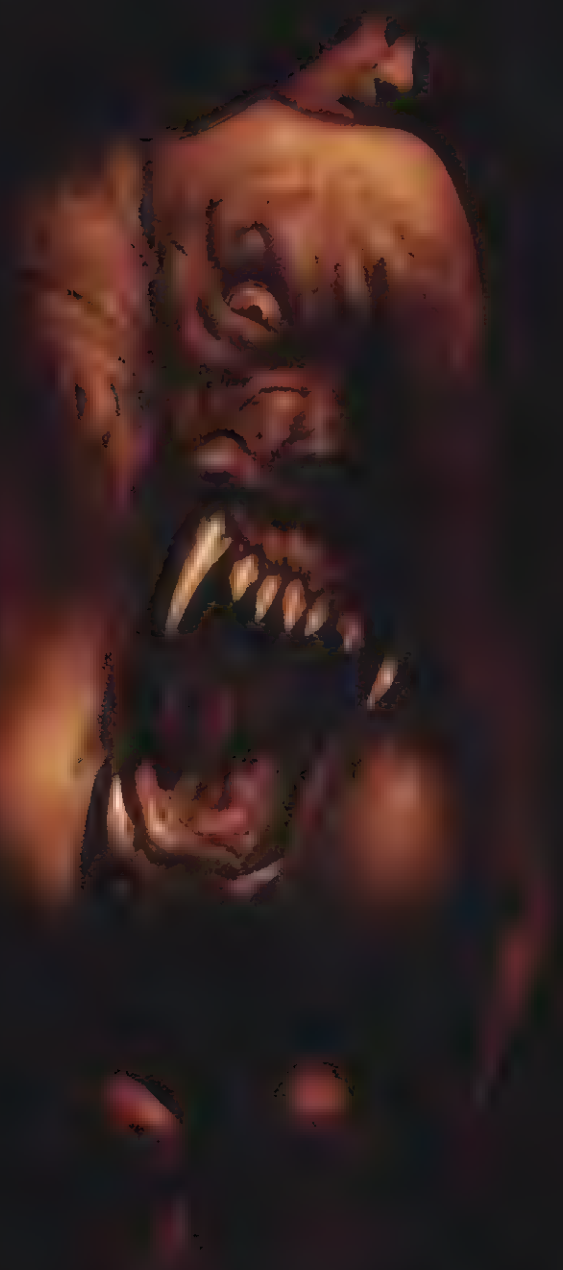
Most Christmas-themed horror films simply use the holiday as cheap garland, convinced that dressing a deranged killer in a phony white beard is a novel enough twist on the slasher formula. Possibly the pre-eminent yuletide fright flick, Lewis Jackson's *Christmas Evil*, on the other hand, presents a nuanced character study of Christmas-obsessed sociopath Harry Stadling (Brandon Maggart).

Traumatized as a child from glimpsing his Santa costume-clad dad slip the yule log to his mother, Harry believes he's Kris Kringle trapped inside a toy factory supervisor's body. In his spare time, he keeps meticulous records cataloguing the behaviour of the neighbourhood kids, but his delusional Santa fantasy doesn't fully bloom until one Christmas Eve when he overhears that his company's generous donation to a local orphanage was only a PR stunt. Donning a fur-trimmed red suit, he hits the streets to separate the naughty from the nice – for good.

Christmas Evil presents most of its chills with dark humour and a witty deconstruction of the Santa myth (what's creepier than a fat man in a red suit who neurotically spies on kids?) What really makes *Christmas Evil* so distinctive, however, is that it's still a festive film at heart. Though Harry dispenses bloody retribution to a few grinches, most of his deeds are positive. He delivers the promised toys to the orphanage and brightens up a holiday party before killjoy adults misconstrue

AFTER DARK FILMS

ANNOUNCES



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HOW BIZARRE, ROB Z'DAR

MANIAC COP (1988)

Starring Tom Atkins, Bruce Campbell and Laurene Landon
Directed by William Lustig
Written by Larry Cohen
Synapse Films



How on earth does a movie starring genre gods like Tom Atkins (*The Fog, Night of the Creeps*) and Bruce Campbell, based on a script by late '70s low-budget genre guru Larry Cohen (*It's Alive, Q: The Winged Serpent*) and directed by notoriously violent-minded William Lustig (*Maniac*) end up being a total bore? *Maniac Cop*'s sleazy concept of a murderous peace officer could have served as a dark commentary on police brutality or vigilantism. (Perhaps a bloodier rogue cop movie in the vein of *Dirty Harry?*). Instead, it's little more than a routine stalk-and-kill affair, as rookie police officer Jack Forrest (Campbell) is forced to prove his innocence by finding the real culprit behind a series of brutal murders committed by someone wearing a cop's uniform.

Regardless, Synapse Films has given this slasher non-classic a glossy special edition treatment worthy of your bail money. The main goodie on the DVD is a commentary track featuring Campbell, Cohen (who also serves as producer), Lustig and composer Jay Chattaway. Although it's a holdover from the laser disc, the good-humoured discussion is loaded with funny anecdotes, behind-the-scenes info, trivia and the occasional potshot at the film. It's surprising to learn just how low budget and rushed *Maniac Cop* truly was, yet, surprisingly, everyone involved (Campbell especially) seems know the film in vivid detail, as they point out otherwise unnoticeable bloopers.

Other features on the disc include international trailers and TV spots, as well as an interview with Robert Z'Dar, who played the titular maniac and didn't get in on the commentary track. Finally, check out the additional footage that was shot to pad the Japanese TV version of the movie, as it includes a totally new ending. If you're a slave to the '80s slasher, this DVD is a worthy master.

Aaron Von Lupton

his intentions and chase him with torches in a climax clearly riffing on *Frankenstein*.

Synapse presents the fully uncut version of *Christmas Evil* with a sleigh full of extras, including a commentary that pairs the director with trash icon John Waters. Although Waters frequently cites the film as a favourite, he mainly just describes the onscreen action while Jackson chuckles. That shouldn't deter fans looking for some original Santa shenanigans from picking up this excellent release, though.

Paul Corupe

SLASHER TIME CAPSULE

DOOM ASYLUM (1987)

Starring Patty Mullen, Kristin Davis and Ruth Collins
Directed by Richard Friedman
Written by Richard Friedman, Steve Menkin and Rick Marx
Code Red



Okay slasher fans, put down your chainsaws and listen up! Every once in awhile a forgotten horror movie from the '80s shows up on our doorstep. Turns out that most of those movies were forgotten for a reason, and *Doom Asylum* is a good example of why.

Director Richard Friedman, better known for helming episodes of *Friday the 13th: The Series* and *Tales from the Darkside* for TV, hauled out his camera in an attempt to wring out the last few drops of blood from a subgenre that by 1987 was old hat to gorehounds: the slasher film.

Starring 1986's *Penthouse* Pet of the Year Patty Mullen – whose short-lived film career culminated with her memorable role in *Frankenhooker* – and Kristin Davis from *Sex and the City*, *Doom Asylum* tells the story of teenagers who picnic at an abandoned asylum (dummies!). In true '80s slasher style, the actresses spend nearly the entire movie in skimpy bikinis, all while a disfigured maniac (who watches Tod Slaughter movies) systematically hunts down and dices up the horny teens.

The movie is definitely a product of its time, and the pastel outfits, references to Ronald Reagan and dated rap music provide some good laughs. There are some nice gory kills, but goofy acting, a horrible soundtrack, lame dialogue and the fact that it's inexplicably padded with nearly ten minutes from old black and white films (including *Sweeney Todd*) make it confusing, disjointed and impossible to care about.

Even with a deformed killer who looks like a cross between Leatherface and Freddy, a great location and hot babes, the end result is not so much a slasher film as a tired parody of one. Don't get me wrong, it's still an enjoyable watch if just to see just how far we've come.

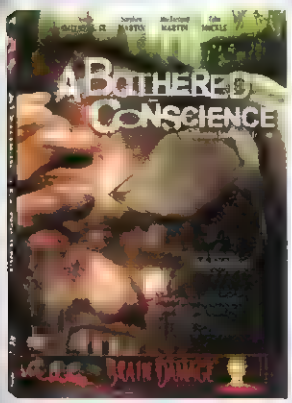
Last Chance Lance



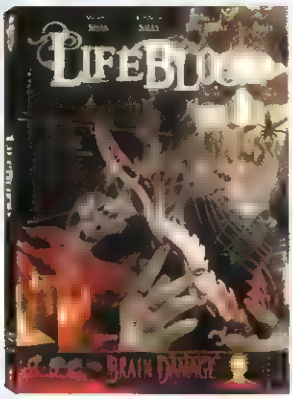


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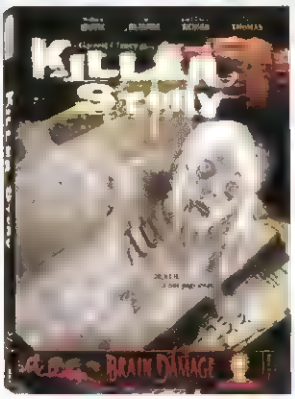
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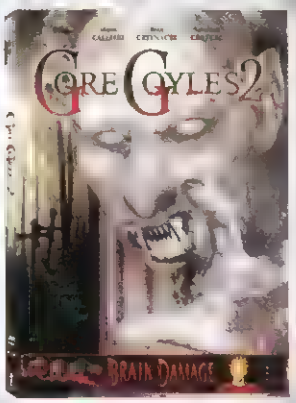
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Have the rotted corpses of the McGavin prey risen from the dead?



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Destinies intertwine in a tale of Gothic horror.



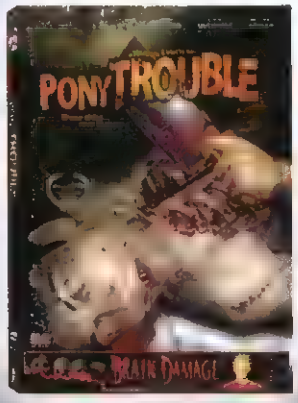
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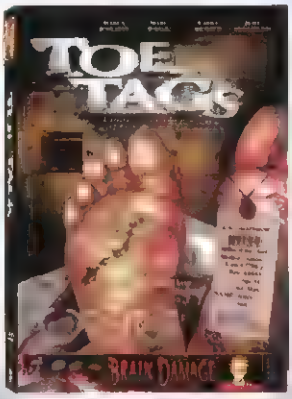
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BD9625
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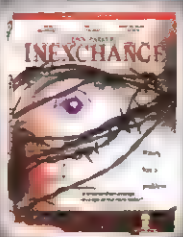














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UNDERGROUND CARTOONIST AND FILMMAKER RICK TREMBLES PAYS TRIBUTE TO DON DOHLER – CHEAP-JACK FILM DIRECTOR, BUDGET EFFECTS GURU AND CREATOR OF... *NIGHTBEAST!*

EULOGY FOR A SCHLOCK KING

BY RICK TREMBLES

Don Dohler, best known for his hokey 1978 zero-budget, critter-encrusted cult sci-fi/horror film *Alien Factor*, succumbed to cancer on December 2, 2006 at the age of 60. *Alien Factor* was Dohler's first film in a list that grew to half a dozen throughout the '80s, before he relinquished directorial duties to moonlighting cop buddy Joe Ripple (*Harvesters*, *Vampire Sisters*). Dohler's slapdash debut is fondly remembered, as are the rest of his films – notably the absurd and gory cheapie *Nightbeast* – for being entirely and marvelously jury-rigged by enthusiastic fans, spearheaded by Dohler, who had a meritable history in the genre.

Dohler got his start in classic underground comix by way of a mascot named Projunior that he created for his early-'60s fanzine *Wild*, a forum for up-and-coming counterculture cartoonists. "Proje" was later adapted in various anthologies by the likes of American underground cartoonist S. Clay Wilson (known for his aggressively violent and sexually explicit content) and even the father of the movement, R. Crumb (Zap Comix). Flattered by the resurrection of his signature character, Dohler was inspired in the 1970s by the undergrounders' DIY approach to create the ultimate bible for armchair special effects enthusiasts: *Cinemagic* magazine.

The magazine can count among its devotees and alumni prolific schlock filmmaker and producer Fred Olen Ray (*The Brain Leeches*, *Bad Girls from Mars*), makeup artists Ed French (*C.H.U.D.*, *Amityville II: The Possession*) and John Buechler (*From Beyond*, *Bride of Re-Animator*), not to mention yours truly, whose words you wouldn't be reading today if I hadn't incessantly pored over every iota written within the pages of Dohler's brain child on how to build Harryhausenesque puppets from common household ingredients. Makeup effects master Rick Baker (*An American Werewolf in London*, *Hellboy*) even once swapped Dohler a Frankenstein's monster mask he made in exchange for a subscription.



Dohler eventually sold *Cinemagic* to Starlog Press, where it continued through the late '80s, but he would resurface here and there with more inspiring offshoots, all while retaining his day job writing and editing for area newspapers.

A lifelong love of special effects (in particular, the original *King Kong*) inspired Dohler to make crude animated films in his youth by drawing onto Scotch Tape folded over and punched with sprocket holes to run through a projector. But the real impetus to make a career change in the direction of cinema came on his 30th birthday when robbers broke into his workplace and put a shotgun to his head, demanding he open the company safe. Dohler was unhurt but changed forever: "Things take on a different perspective when you think your life is over," he explained in his 1999 biography *B-Movie Horrors* (available from his website timewarpfilms.com).

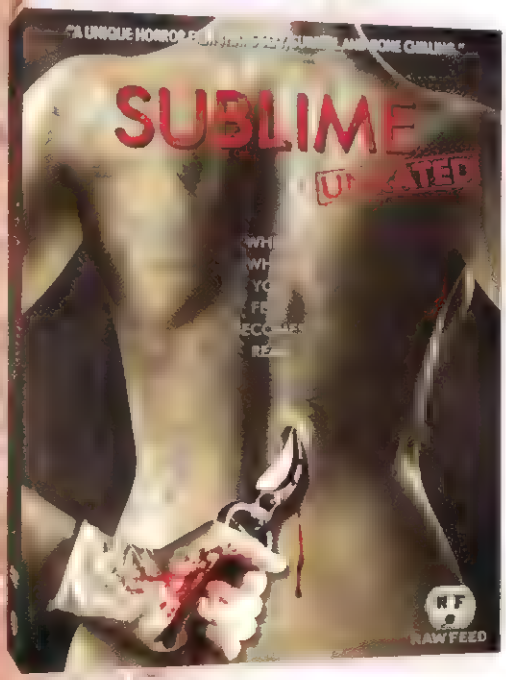
So, recruiting a team of Cinemagicians culled from his 'zine, Dohler embarked on another project he'd always wanted to take on, his first feature. After a short theatrical stay, *Alien Factor* (about a bunch of intergalactic zoo specimens who mutilate the population of a small town after their spaceship crash lands on earth) enjoyed a healthy run on television. His films *Fiend* (1980), *Nightbeast* (1982), *Galaxy Invader* (1985) and *Blood Massacre* (1991) soon followed.

Working out of his native Baltimore in tandem with John Waters, Dohler was actually one of the last of the non-Hollywood independents making films that were meant for theatre or television before the camcorder took over for the Super-8 and sparked the straight-to-video boom. (George Stover, one of Dohler's actors and best friends, was also one of Waters' regular collaborators, a.k.a "Dreamlanders") But whereas the "Prince of Puke" honed and perfected a deliberate camp aesthetic, Dohler's epics were painfully sincere; unintentionally cheesy as opposed to flatulently so.

Dohler's charm was in his guerila approach to filmmaking, where a recurring troupe of friends, family members and household pets were filmed in and around his home to cut costs. His suburban vistas – inadvertent eyesores more than idealizations – provide such a home-movie feel you'll either shrink from voyeurism or get deeply nostalgic if you happen to share a similar frame of reference. I do, and I'll miss Dohler's infectious determination for turning slapdash to panache.

Rick Trembles is the author/illustrator of the comic strip Motion Picture Purgatory *and director of two animated films based on his bizarre creations.*

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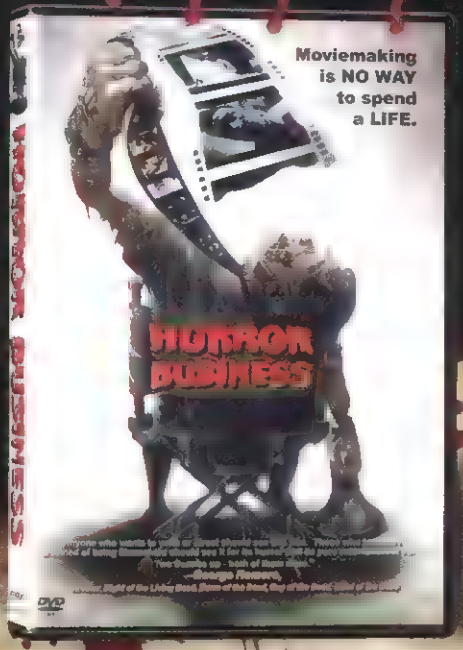


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LAS MOMIAS DE MEXICO

THE AZTEC MUMMY COLLECTION (1957)

Starring Ramón Gay, Rosa Arenas
and Luis Aceves Castañeda
Directed by Rafael Portillo
Written by Guillermo Calderón
and Alfredo Salazar
BCI Eclipse



The Robot vs. The Aztec Mummy: *Popoca, Mexico's answer to Im-ho-tep.*

When the classic Universal horror films arrived on television in the 1950s, it was Mexican film producers who first saw the box-office possibilities of reviving timeless monsters like Dracula and the Mummy and recontextualizing them within their own cultural history. The *Aztec Mummy* and its sequels, *Curse of the Aztec Mummy* and *The Robot vs. the Aztec Mummy*, were among the country's first attempts to create an entirely indigenous creature feature, and helped usher in a new wave of Mexican horror, as showcased on BCI Eclipse's new DVD box set of these three influential feature films.

While the re-dubbed sequels were imported to North American audiences by cheapjack distributor K. Gordon Murray in the 1960s, this marks the first time that *The Aztec Mummy* has been unwrapped for an English-speaking audience. In this once-lost film Dr. Almada (Ramón Gay) uses hypnotism on his fiancée Flora (Rosa Arenas) to uncover the details of her past life as a former Aztec princess who was executed for her affair with a warrior named Popoca. Buried alive beside his murdered lover, Popoca was cursed and sentenced to spend eternity protecting a breastplate etched with a map leading to hidden Aztec treasure. The Bat, a masked criminal who is actually Almada's rival Dr. Krupp (Luis Aceves Castañeda), overhears the story, however, and tails the scientist and his assistant Pinacate (Crox Alvarado) to the temple. Eventually, both parties discover that the curse is real, as their blasphemous attempts to recover the artifact arouse the wrath of the mummified Popoca.



The tomb raiding continues in *Curse of the Aztec Mummy*, as Krupp escapes the police and steals the priceless breastplate, later kidnapping Flora to blackmail Almada into translating the Aztec hieroglyphics. Luckily, The Angel, a mysterious masked wrestler, arrives to free them just as Popoca crashes through the door to knock out Krupp's henchmen.

The Robot vs. the Aztec Mummy, which begins with an astounding 25 minutes of recycled footage from the two earlier films, finds Krupp hatching a new plan to stop Popoca in his undead tracks by building one of most ridiculous robots ever seen on screen to distract the creature so Krupp's gang will be free to plunder the ancient temple.

As opposed to the stylish Mexican horror classic *El Vampiro* (*RM#64*), which was filmed in the same year as *The Aztec Mummy* trilogy, these films never aspire to be more than action-packed juvenile horror fantasies. Though the first entry injects some Gothic atmosphere into the shadowy Aztec temple, the series is generally free of artistic integrity and logical plotting, instead holding a distinctive place in Mexico's history of horror by shaping the country's sometimes wild B-movie aesthetic. With a dizzying mix of melodrama, comedy, wrestling brawls and science gone amok ripped straight out of the Hollywood serials, this trilogy anticipates Mexico's trashier horror films like *Braniac* and *Night of the Bloody Apes*, plus Santo's highly popular lucha libre films of the 1960s.

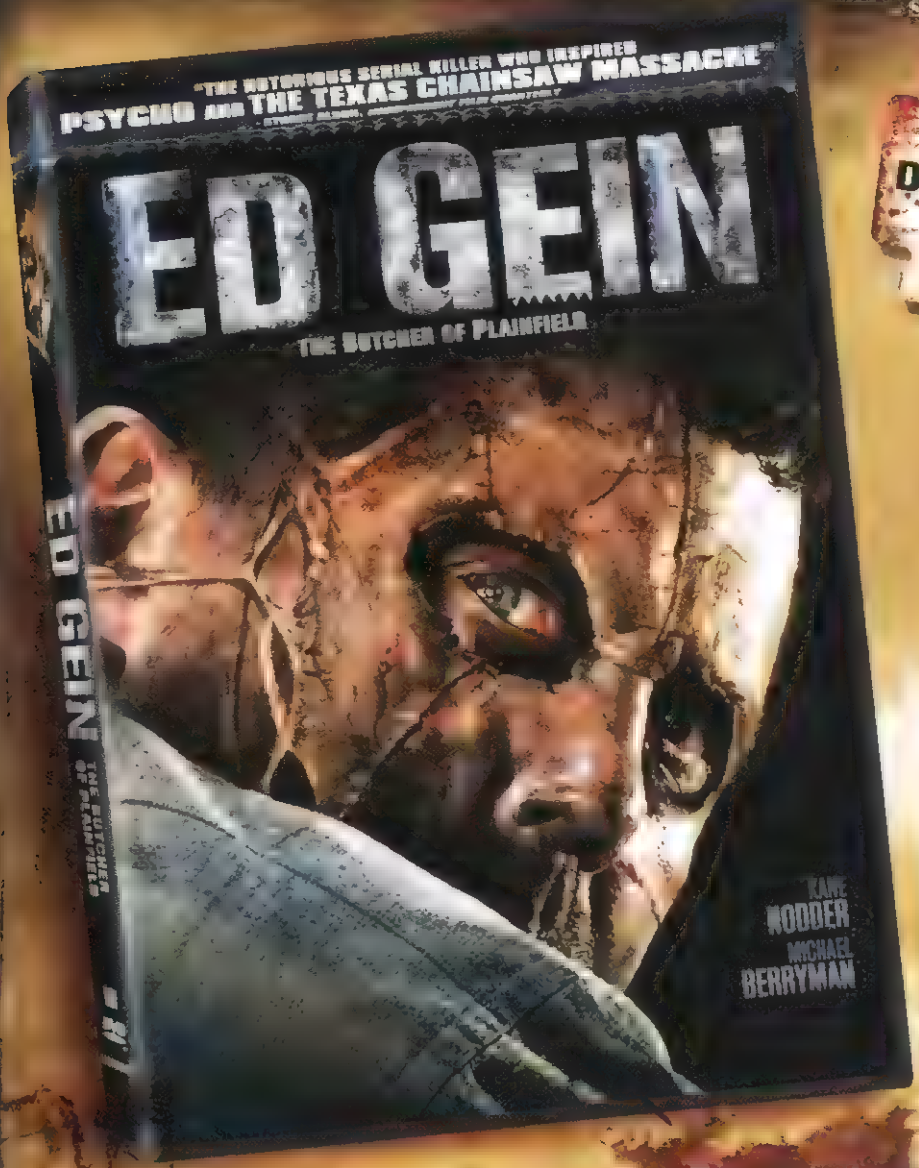
When compared to the Universal films that inspired them, the *Aztec Mummy* trilogy varies noticeably in both the overall look and role of their titular monster. Sporting ragged, long dark hair, and a withered but strongly chiselled face, Popoca is not a sinister creature like Karloff's Im-ho-tep, as his living death is simply the result of his love for a princess that crossed class boundaries. He remains noble, even as he kills to protect the treasure from intruders, subtly emphasizing the importance of the country's history and cultural identity at a time when it was in turmoil. Instead of a manifestation of foreign fears, the Aztec Mummy emerges almost as a patriotic figure, in many ways just as important as *Curse*'s masked grappler hero, The Angel.

To celebrate the *Aztec Mummy* trilogy's resurrection to DVD, BCI Eclipse has put together a handsome box set decorated with original theatrical poster art. As a bonus, both the original Spanish and English-dubbed versions of the films have been included, along with a fascinating booklet by Mexploitation expert David Wilt, ensuring that Popoca's deadly curse will endure.

Paul Corupe

"A DISTURBING LOOK AT THE NOTORIOUS SERIAL KILLER WHO INSPIRED THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, PSYCHO AND THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE"

– Stuart Alson, *Independent Film Quarterly*



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"Ladies and lads, I give you the lovely Coralina Cataldi Tassoni..."

The Mad Musings of a Schizoid Cinephile



by Chris Alexander

I've always been attracted to those who communicate their passions through a variety of mediums. So when I discovered that Italian-American actress Coralina Cataldi Tassoni was not only one of the heiresses of post-'70s Eurohorror but *also* an accomplished painter and avant-garde rock star, I was struck with the urge to open up her beautiful skull for a spell and muck about in her brilliant brain.

Born in NYC in 1971 but transplanted to Rome at an early age, Coralina dabbled in opera, theatre and film before landing squarely on the radar of Dario Argento. At the tender age of eighteen, the ingenue was cast as the spoiled undead birthday girl Sally in the Argento-produced, Lamberto Bava-directed shocker *Demons 2*, followed by key roles in the Argento epics *Opera* (she played costume designer Giulia, the unfortunate lass who gets her throat opened up by the black gloved killer) and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

But enough of this half-assed bio business, let's turn the word on the woman herself, for the first of a two-part conversation on music (her debut album *Limbo Balloon* is out now), acting and her role in Andreas Marfori's dubious clunker *Evil Clutch*. Ladies and lads, I give you the lovely Coralina Cataldi Tassoni...

Coralina, how does it feel to be such a badass?

[Laughs] Well, growing up, my parents always called me "The Bad Seed," so I guess becoming a badass was inevitable.

It shows progression, anyway. Tell me a bit about how you became what you've become.

I come from the opera world. My dad had an opera company here in New York, and by the time I was three-and-a-half he had put me in all these little roles, touring Rome. I basically hung out with opera singers my whole life. In my teens I starred in a short film that was sort of a big deal. Argento saw that and the rest is history.



In* Demons 2 *you were drenched in blood and heavy prosthetic makeup [see above]. What was that like?

The whole experience was thrilling, amazing. Just to hang out with and work with so many great people like Sergio Stivaletti and Argento – I mean, I was terrified of course, and I was always covered in goo and gore, and it was so gross and everyone on set was grossed out by me ... but I loved it.

You're also in Lamberto Bava's upcoming film* Ghost Son*? What's your relationship with Bava like?

Well, there's a lot of mutual respect, I think. He's a sweetheart and so kind ... maybe he won't be happy to be called "kind," and that's not to say that he's not a strong or tough man, but he's always so kind to me.

I have to ask this...what the holy hell is with* Evil Clutch*!?!

You didn't like it?

Ack! Good lord, No!

Then you're no friend of mine! I'm kidding...

It's bloody out of control – not in a good way, though.

I know, I know. It's way beyond me

Did you know while filming it that something was rotten in Denmark?

When I made that movie it was, like, all coming at me: *Demons 2*, *Opera* ... just a crazy time, overwhelming, and I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to be in another movie where I got covered in special effects. So Marfori rewrote it and toned it down. *Then* I go and see the thing and he's spliced in all this footage of me in bloody make-up from an earlier short film I made with him! Ugh! I mean that's just one of the things that went bad. We all got ripped off, but hey, we all make mistakes and it was either that or some really bad porn. I kind of wish I did the really bad porn.

Tune in next month when Coralina muses on her music and gives us deeper details about working with Argento on the set of his hotly anticipated *Suspiria/Inferno* sequel, *The Third Mother*. Alexander out.

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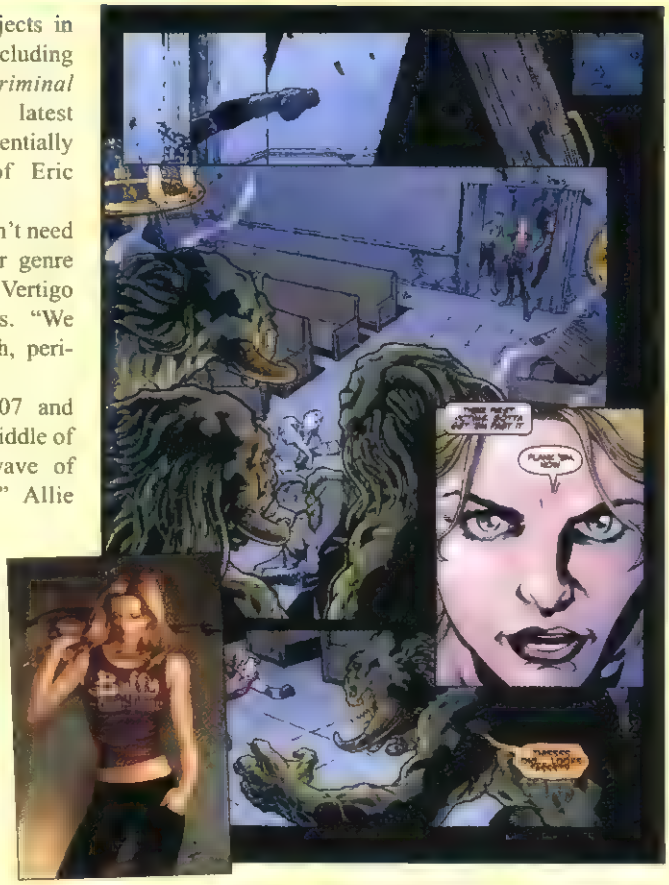
PUREBRED HORROR: A CELEBRATION OF DARK HORSE
CROSSING MIDNIGHT #1-3
by Mike Carey and Jim Fern *DC/Vertigo*
THE GRAVE ROBBER'S DAUGHTER
by Richard Sala *Fantagraphics*
TAG: CURSED #1 (OF 5)
by Keith Giffen, Mike Leib and Chee *BOOM! Studios*
WHISTLES #2
by Andrew Hussie *SLG*
DEAR JULIA
by Brian Biggs *Topshelf*

From the late '50s to the early '70s, British film studio Hammer became known as "The House of Horror." In the modern-day comic medium, one particular publisher is chomping at the bit to stake a similar genre-wide claim. The company in question is Dark Horse, and its track record is impressive. Let's have a look at the past, present and future of comics' "Horse of Horror," with Dark Horse jockey (well, editor) Scott Allie.

"By the early '90s – after the '80s drove horror into the dirt – I knew that a huge resurgence was coming in terms of the genre's popularity," says the Portland-based Allie. He astutely cites the advent of TV's *X-Files* (and, later, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), literature's already-booming Clive Barker (and, later, J.K. Rowling, whose *Harry Potter* books are replete with horror influences) and Dark Horse's own legendary genre contributions, Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* (1993) and the well-ahead-of-its-time *Zombie World* (1997), for the increased interest.

"The subject matter of horror was landing in North American living rooms in a palatable way," he adds. "People who were growing up reading Barker or even Rowling would find it easier to embrace M.R. James."

Pre- and post-millennium tension also reshaped the terrain to a certain extent, but there's no doubt that Steve Niles' landmark vampire story *30 Days of Night* (IDW, 2002) led the charge in terms of comicdom embracing horror again. But because Dark Horse had been early, they were ready. Within one year, Allie and publisher Mike Richardson went after horror full-throttle. A 2003 re-branding initiative cleverly called "Drawing on your nightmares" positioned Dark Horse as the go-to destination for horror, delivering over a dozen different projects in one publishing year, including Niles' own *Criminal Macabre*, Mignola's latest *Hellboy*, and the essentially mainstream debut of Eric Powell's *The Goon*.



Buffy the Vampire Slayer *returns in a new Dark Horse series and (left) an adaptation of the Pang Brothers'* ***The Messengers****, titled* ***The Secret****.*

"We realized we didn't need to vertically stack our genre material like [DC's] Vertigo [imprint]," Allie says. "We just needed to publish, period."

Fast-forward to 2007 and Dark Horse is in the middle of its second official wave of "nightmare drawing." Allie adds that the emphasis never disappeared; it's just that this step marks the second time the company has advertised its strategy. The contenders haven't changed but the ranks have swelled. Niles' Cal McDonald is back, as are Mignola's *Hellboy* (and the world-of-its-own *B.P.R.D.*) and Powell's multi-award-winning *Goon*. Newcomers include Richardson's teen-horror-with-a-twist *The Secret*, a brilliant adaptation of the Pang Brothers film *The Messengers* (brilliant because it matches its source in terms of suspense by retelling the story from an entirely different character perspective), and the relaunch of the popular Image series *Rex Mundi*. The new kid on the block to beat, though, is one of the modern genre's elder stateswomen: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Still helmed by Joss Whedon, it arrives with a vengeance this month.



"It's the official eighth season of the show," Allie says proudly. "It picks up right where the TV series ended and moves it forward under Joss' direction. It ended on TV because TV was done and Joss wasn't; this is the next phase of Buffy's career TV wasn't big enough to do it."

Looking ahead, Allie promises a relentless pursuit of new horror when the '06-'07 phase finishes in August. (And bear in mind that *Buffy* alone will run for three years.) Already set for year's end: the sequel to Allie's woefully overlooked 2003 series *The Devil's Footprints*, non-*Conan* horror adaptations from the works of Robert E. Howard, and "top secret" Niles material.

For sheer quantity, "The Horse of Horror" is a safe bet. And in racing, when a Dark Horse wins, that horse wins big.

QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY GARY BUTLER, ERIC GRANT AND MARK MOYES



CROSSING MIDNIGHT didn't seem like a horror book until the finale of the first issue – a shocking (and literal) splash page wherein a family dog is found chopped to pieces, practically puréed. Suddenly, a mother's earlier innocent prayer is understood as being an unintentional deal with the devil, and it's clear that Hell will break loose for twins Kai and Toshi, descendants of post-nuclear Nagasaki, born eight minutes apart, (The younger sister arriving at 12:07 a.m., hence the book's title.) Jim Fern's simple, spacious art is not to be trusted either; the moment you get comfortable, the Japanese devil appears to mutilate your mother with seventeen psychic swords. Knives out, indeed. **GB**

CONVOLUTED. OUTRAGEOUS. ABSURD and oh-so-gothic, Richard Sala's black and white horror mysteries are pretty much as good as light horror entertainment gets. The writer/artist/custom font designer's latest, *The Grave Robber's Daughter*, follows the driver of a broken-down vehicle into a barely-on-the-map town where all the adults have disappeared and killer clowns walk the streets. Angular architecture (and, where appropriate, teeth) make for a campy atmospheric answer to Caligari's infamous cabinet. Sala fans will delight to see the return of girl detective Judy Drood, who seems to have developed quite the f'n potty mouth since her last adventure. **GB**



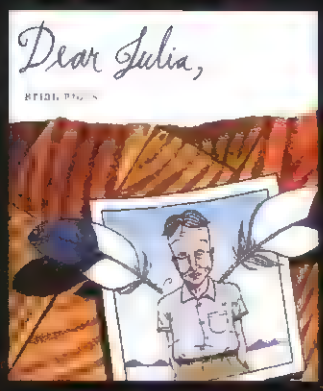
THE ORIGINAL. ACCLAIMED *Tag* miniseries created kitchen-sink horror out of an ancient curse, which sees its victims trapped in their own dead, decaying bodies, racing to find the next deserving sucker onto whom they can pass the hex. The calculatedly clever first issue of *Tag: Cursed* introduces hardware store owner Ed, who survived a hex only to find that his banal life was barely worth the effort. The rest of the five-issue miniseries will hopefully send this petty, depressed slug of a man on a quest that may be horrific realism's answer to TV's *Quantum Leap* and *My Name is Earl*. By rooting the *Tag* concept in tiny, everyday cruelties, this title is a misanthrope's must-read. **EG**





THREE WORDS: SCI-FI CLOWN CANNIBALISM. It's *Pinocchio* meets *Candide* meets Kubrick doing funny. In *Whistles*, a naïve clown is thrust into a world where ringleaders make snacks out of injured performers and sometimes a circus star's gotta turn a trick to make ends meet. The writing? Twisted but clever. (Gumbin the clown is the perfect superhero satire.) The art? Off the page – thanks to creative panel work and shading, the action reaches out and squirts you in the eye. The irony? There is no page; this is SLG's first digital-only comic. **MM**

THE COMICRYPT



DEAR JULIA. (2000)
by Brian Biggs
TopShelf

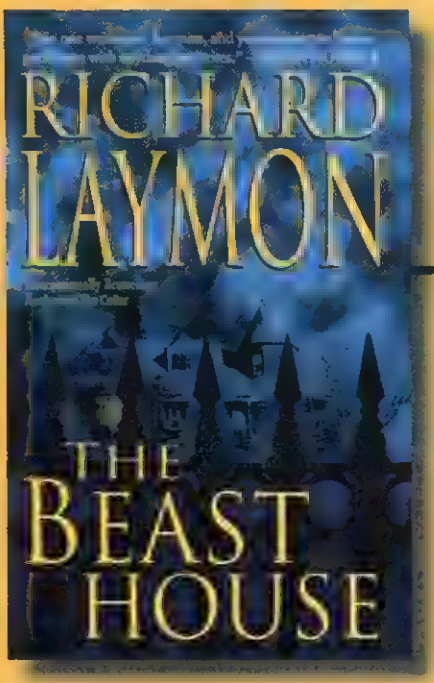
Boyd Soloman believes he can fly, and it's actually irrelevant whether *Dear Julia*, is his love letter or suicide note. As Philadelphia-based Brian Biggs' masterful study of (in)sanity opens, Soloman is ready to take the proverbial plunge; how he got there is an actual mystery the answer of which is coded within the art itself. Consistent four-panel pages revel in cleanliness and detail but, as with any story driven by psychological damage and mischievous memory, this is the kind of book where what's in the background is as important as what's in the foreground.

The ending could go either way but, reminiscent of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, the real question is not what is happiness' price, but rather, what is happiness – period? Will Eisner called *Dear Julia*, "a thoughtfully creative book in the vanguard of our medium." He was right – Biggs delivers a doozy of a waking nightmare, and that sick feeling creeping through your gut page after breathtaking page is the abyss gazing back. Make sure roof access is closed off before reading. **GB**



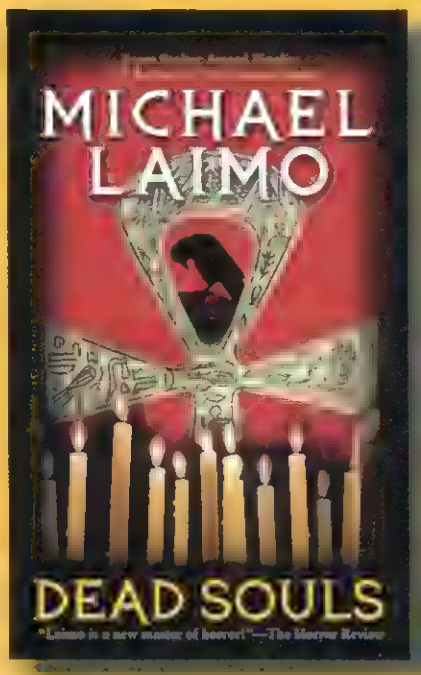


THE BEST IN HORROR COMES FROM LEISURE BOOKS!



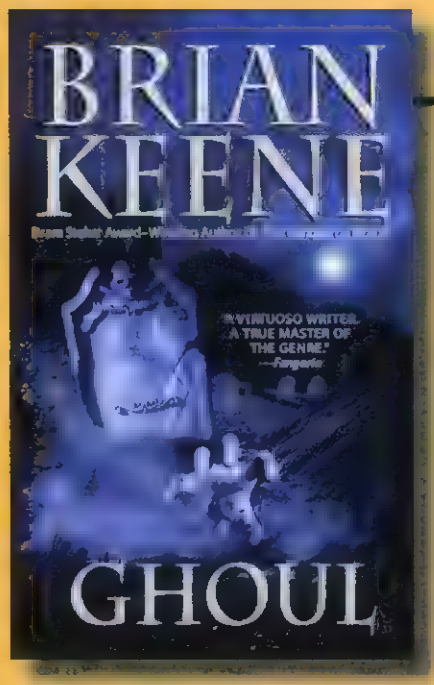
"If you've missed Laymon, you've missed a treat."
—Stephen King

In this sequel to the classic, bestselling horror novel, *The Cellar*, a group of friends and a curious writer dare to enter The Beast House, beginning a new nightmare of carnage.

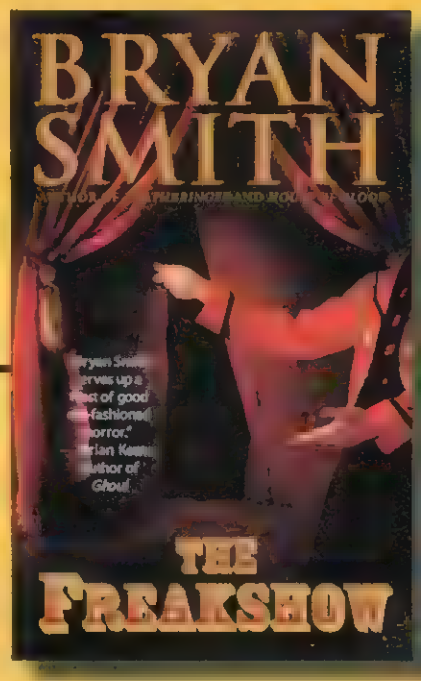


"Laimo cranks up the fear quota several notches."
—*Masters of Terror*

When Johnny Petrie inherits an estate from a man he's never heard of before, he knows he can finally escape the hell of living with his religious zealot mother and drunken father. He doesn't realize that the hell he is moving into will be far, far worse.



"*GHOUL*...is one of those richly developed and highly entertaining novels that I cannot recommend enough. If you pass up this novel then you will miss out on one of the best works of fiction that the horror genre has to offer."
—*Horror World*



"Bryan Smith is a force to be reckoned with!"
—Douglas Clegg, author of *Nightmare House*

Once the Flaherty Brothers Traveling Carnivale and Freakshow rolls into Pleasant Hills, Tennessee, the quiet little town will never be the same. In fact much of the town won't survive.

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Dublin's Literary Ghosts • Unusual Indiana • Filmic Fright Fiction



Literary Walking Tours of Gothic Dublin

Brian J. Showers
Nonsuch Publishing

You don't need to have seen Dublin to know it. Home to so many world-class writers (in most genres and eras), the capital of Ireland has been perfectly canonized in literature for centuries. But if you are going to visit, may I suggest carrying this ghastly guide?

The goal of author Brian J. Showers (an American) is to trace the history of three great Irish genre writers – Bram Stoker, Joseph Sheridan le Fanu and Charles Maturin – by taking readers to the places they lived and worked on their Gothic masterpieces. In doing so he manages to cover more sinister spots than even the most enthusiastic traveller could ever hope to visit.

Bram Stoker may be native Irish, but he is rarely associated with Dublin. Thus, the book's attempt to connect his olde haunts as the inspiration for *Dracula* seems like a stretch. Still, if you're going to walk about the city, you might as well take a look at Stoker's birthplace, some of his first editions and St. Michan's vault of mummies – one of which is rumoured to be Stoker's own mum.

The chapter on le Fanu is more inspiring. Despite few references to his famous vampire tale *Carmilla*, there are loads of links to his other supernatural works, such as *House by the Churchyard* and "Ghost Stories of Chapelizod." Aficionados of this author will delight in seeing his words come to life as they follow the tour.

I have to admit ignorance of Maturin and his cult novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*, but by reading about his Dublin roots I learned that Saint Stephen's Green was not always the manicured tourist trap it is today. In fact, the park has seen its share of public executions and once even bordered a leper colony.

This is a near-perfect guide to Dublin's bloodiest pubs, churches and cemeteries – places of "melancholy picturesqueness" and great literary import – although, as with all such books, it requires much imagination. Showers' writing, however decent, cannot compare to the vivid, chilling descriptions the authors originally captured, but luckily excerpts of their works have been reprinted within, making it a good read even if you're not going to the Emerald Isle.

Liisa Ladouceur



Strange Indiana Monsters

Michael Newton
Schiffer Books

Just because you can't see them, doesn't mean they're not out there, or so postulates prolific author Michael Newton in his sober, authoritative and frequently compelling new book *Strange Indiana Monsters*. In this survey of the "hidden" animals of his home state, the author makes note of virtually every encounter with an unknown or displaced creature on record in Indiana. It's a slim tome – only 100 pages or so, and generously sprinkled with pictures – but Newton has certainly done his research, combing newspaper accounts and the files of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources in an effort to inspire local cryptozoologists to solve some of the Hoosier state's most unusual animal mysteries.

Despite a wealth of statistics that won't mean much to most readers, *Strange Indiana Monsters* offers up just enough curious (and often humorous) anecdotal evidence to pique the interest of even firm disbelievers. This is especially true of a chapter devoted to Indiana's most infamous cryptid, Oscar, the "Beast of 'Busco." This six-foot-long giant turtle caused a sensation in 1949 when he was the subject of multiple sightings in Churubusco, Indiana's Fulk Lake. Sought by deep-sea divers, trappers and even a seductive female turtle imported to bring Oscar out into the open, the Beast was never discovered, even when the frustrated property owner tried unsuccessfully to drain the lake.

Less exciting accounts of giant snakes, piranhas and even an African wildcat can probably be attributed to escaped exotic pets – a fact Newton readily admits – but many others defy logic completely. Fascinating encounters with sea serpents, a colony of six-inch long squids supposedly





The Grim Reader

THE KEEPER
Sarah Langan
HarperTorch



Perpetual outcast and terminal weirdo Susan Marley wreaks havoc from beyond the grave on a near-ghost town in this solid debut by Sarah Langan. It takes a little over half of the novel before the action really gets rolling, but once it does, the lengthy set-up pays off. A subtle, bleak tone and well-drawn characters elevate this one above the pack.

Brett Alexander Savory

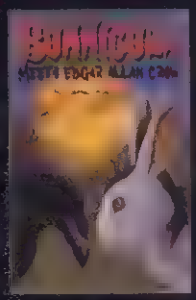
THE BEAST OF WOM
Janet Lee Carey
Atheneum Books



On the logbound island of Enness, two kids set off on a dangerous quest to save their family from the Shriker, dog of doom! But was anyone really waiting for a Celtic legend-inspired young adult replay of *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, with fairies instead of lycanthropes? Judging by this, the verdict would have to be "Christ, no."

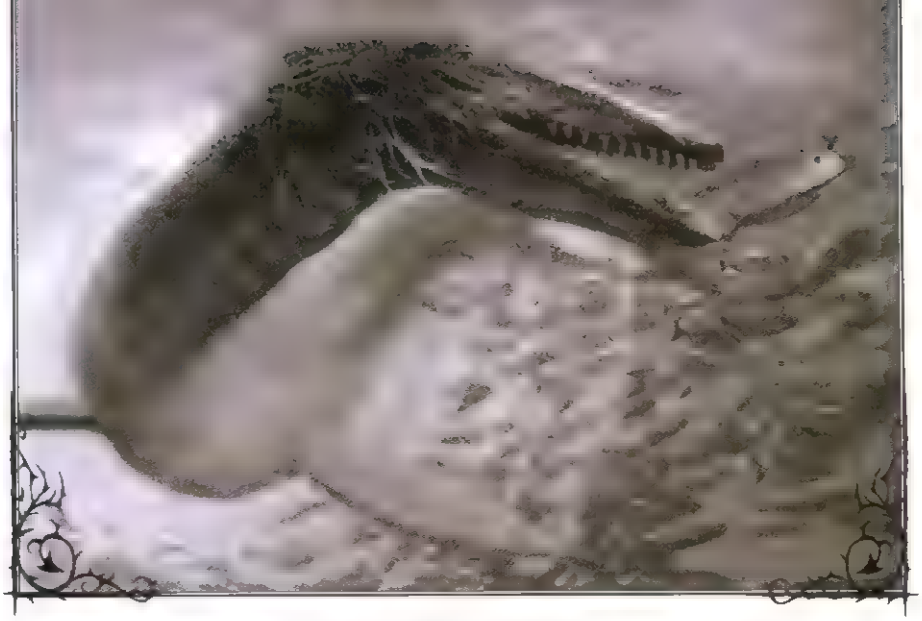
Gemma Files

BUNNICULA MEETS EDGAR ALLAN CROW
James Howe
Simon and Schuster



When twelve-year-old Pete Monroe wins a visit from his favourite children's horror author, M.T. Graves and his pet crow, the rest of the Monroe family pets are suspicious. Graves, after all, writes books in which horrible things happen to animals, and now he's fixated on Bunnicula. Howe's latest, like the earlier *Bunnicula* tales, comes chock-full of clever chills for the kiddies.

Monica S. Kuebler



Strange Indiana Monsters: *A cryptozoological serpent said to inhabit a local lake, as rendered by William Rebsamen.*

discovered living in industrial sludge and, of course, the elusive Sasquatch are meticulously catalogued, while the final chapter details only the most outlandish reports, including dragons, mermaids and werewolves.

Due to its limited scope, Newton's work will appeal primarily to Indianians who want to delve into the arcane world of their own backyard, but it should also prove an interesting read for any amateur "strange monster" hunter on the lookout for something out of the ordinary.

Paul Corupe

midnight premiere
Tom Piccirilli, ed.
Cemetery Dance

Fearing redundancy during the 1980s horror lit boom, publishers and editors began categorizing their short fiction collections, be it by archetype (vampires, zombies), common theme or setting (urban, western). *Midnight Premiere* may or may not be the first to tie stories together with cinema as the loose theme, but its unique lineup of talent – a mix of established and lesser-known horror scribes, as well as directors, screenwriters and actors – has much more than novelty on its side.

Real-life celebrities – mostly dead ones who can't sue – populate several, often satirical, stories here, including Gary Braunbeck's "Onlookers," a bizarro bit of existential angst involving a childhood chance encounter with Buster Keaton and Samuel Beckett. Other dead celebs, this time from the '50s B-horror canon, turn up in "Ocular," which finds *Masters of Horror* creator Mick Garris in familiar territory both thematically and geographically, and a certain well-known, rotund, opportunistic documentary filmmaker gets his comeuppance in Thomas F. Monteleone's "End of Story."

Horror fiction cult fave Jack Ketchum weighs in with "Elusive," an uncharacteristically gore-free item about a horror film that may doom a man whose repeated attempts to see it are continually thwarted. And Al Sarrantonio – my pick for the most underrated contemporary American horror scribe – whips out "Baby Boss and the Underground Hamsters: A Feature Length Cartoon." It's a tale which scarcely qualifies as horror by even the most liberal standards but must be given props for sheer audacity.

Best overall: veteran novelist Brian Hodge's "The Passion of the Beast," a fictitious *Entertainment Weekly* piece about the controversy surrounding an alternate take on *The Passion of the Christ*, which tells the story from Satan's point of view.

Still, one can't help but pine for conspicuous absentees like Joe Lansdale and Clive Barker, not to mention a host of other screenwriters and directors, but that's why





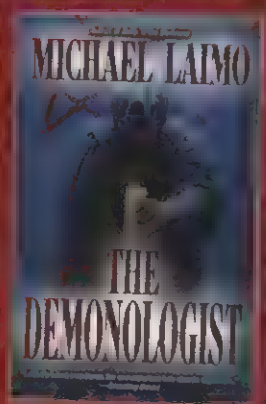
Though Biblical horror had its heyday in the 1970s, one author aims to make demonic evil scary again.

The Holy Horrors of Michael Laimo

by Monica S. Kuebler

Born and raised a good Jew, a pious man, a preacher, until his own adulterous nature and a mysterious code he found hidden in the Bible changed all that. Seventeen years ago, on his youngest son Bryan's first birthday, Conroy systematically slaughtered his wife, daughter, and five other innocent civilians. It was all part of the patriarch's last desperate, misguided attempt to keep his family together by securing them a place in the "ancestral afterlife," but his youngest survived, leaving the ritual unfinished – and waiting. *Dead Souls* is Bryan's story.

"I feel that those who turn to God more frequently, more devoutly, are more prone to suffer from their ill-wills and desires," explains author Michael Laimo, who was raised Catholic, but never truly embraced the doctrine. "To me there's nothing scarier [than religious horror]. Perhaps it hearkens back to my childhood days, having always been a bit spooked in churches. The whole Jesus-rises-from-the-dead thing, and the fact there are claims of presences looking down upon churchgoers. And then those statues with the big glossy eyes and bloody hands! These images have stayed with me through adulthood. It's proved itself a wealthy source of ideas for me."



Like his earlier novel *The Demonologist*, *Dead Souls* (both available from Leisure Books) is stripping with religious imagery – including several crucifixions, even one involving the family dog. Essentially, though, it's about Johnny Petrie (a.k.a. Bryan Conroy), who, on his eighteenth birthday, inherits his family's dilapidated estate, which has been empty since the massacre. Johnny's birth father, the aforementioned Conroy, believed he could provide his wife and three children with an "eternal afterlife, bound by love and commitment," if only he could flawlessly pull off the associated ritual (which calls upon the Egyptian god Osiris, who governs the realm of resurrection). But it was interrupted and a demon far less benevolent than Osiris was summoned forth.

"It all began when I had an idea for a book about a man who finds a code in the Bible that suggested Jesus' rise from the dead was due to something other than a miracle," explains Laimo of his decision to combine modern-day Christianity with ancient Egyptian lore. "At the same time I was given a book entitled *Summoning Spirits*, by occult author Konstantinos, which dealt with a variety of spells for contacting beings from the spirit world, some of them Egyptian gods. I became fascinated by the work in this book."

To further his research, two-time Stoker Award nominee Laimo contacted Konstantinos to get his feedback on some of the scenes he wanted to write for *Dead Souls*. And while the resulting work is one of pure imagination, the histories, actions, spells and spirits within are largely based on facts and ideas from Konstantinos' work.

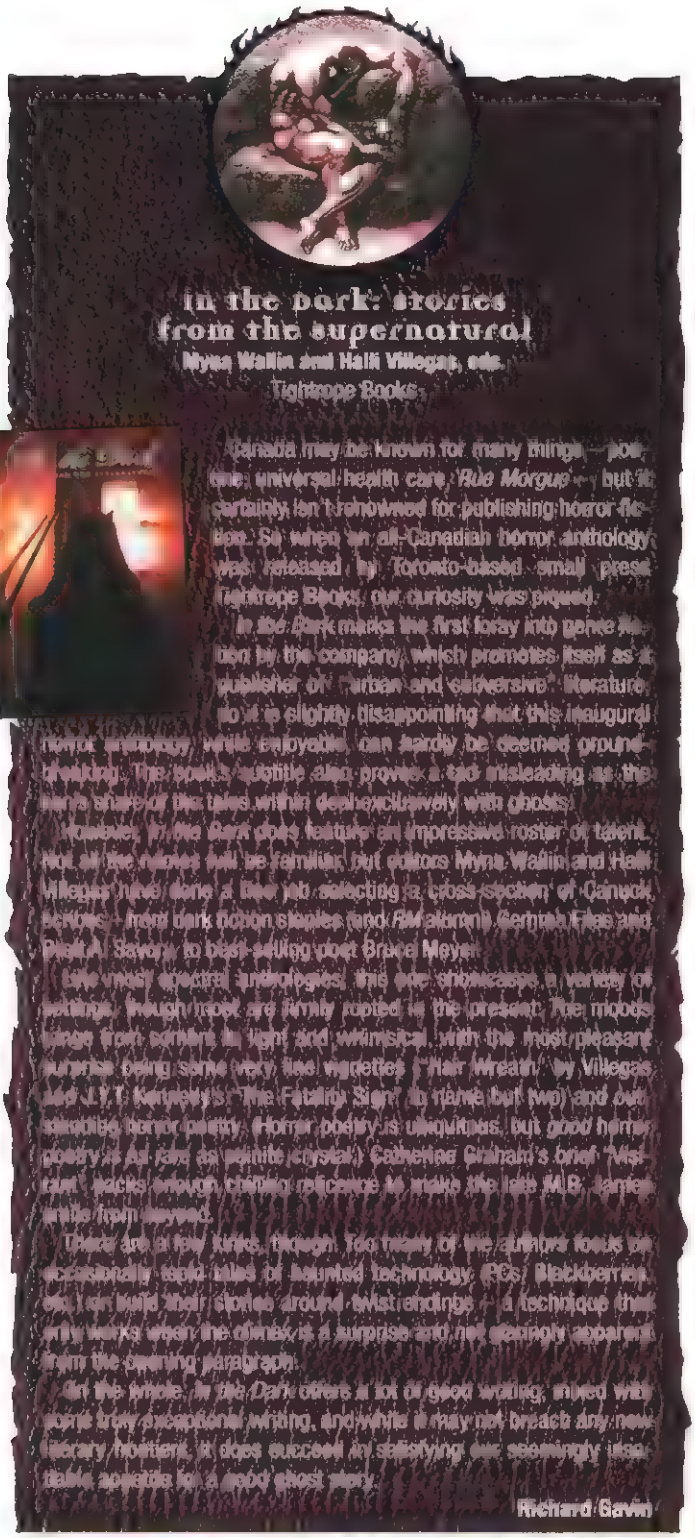


But religion isn't the only recurring theme in Laimo's fiction. The author, who credits the works of Stephen King, Clive Barker, Dean Koontz and Robert McCammon for inspiring him to write, returns time and time again to the family unit as a fervent breeding ground for terror, whether that is represented by one family member's ultimate descent into evil and insanity or, as in Johnny Petrie's case, an instance where his parents and siblings are determined to kill him so that he will join them in death – sooner rather than later.

"To me, there is no stronger bond than the family unit, and to me, the only thing that can tear it apart is evil influence – we read about it every day in the papers, albeit on a more psychological level," says Laimo. "I try to take that family unit and push its limits with the most horrible evils my imagination has to offer, both psychological and supernatural."

Dead Souls will be followed by another Biblical horror offering titled *Fires Rising*, set in Manhattan during an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, after which Laimo hopes to explore some new themes. That shouldn't be difficult, with a sequel to his 2004 novel *Deep in the Darkness* already in the works and a film adaptation of his short story "Anxiety" – about a psychiatrist who forces his patients to face their fears – currently in production and scheduled for release this December.

For more information on Michael Laimo, visit laimo.com.



In the Dark: Stories from the Supernatural

Myna Wallin and Halli Villegas, eds.

Tightrope Books

Canada may be known for many things — poutine, universal health care, *Rue Morgue* — but it certainly isn't renowned for publishing horror fiction. So when an all-Canadian horror anthology was released by Toronto-based small press Tightrope Books, our curiosity was piqued.

In the Dark marks the first foray into genre fiction by the company, which promotes itself as a publisher of "urban and subversive" literature, so it is slightly disappointing that this inaugural horror anthology, while enjoyable, can hardly be deemed groundbreaking. The book's subtitle also proves a bit misleading, as the majority of the tales within deal exclusively with ghosts.

However, *In the Dark* does feature an impressive roster of talent. Not all the names will be familiar, but editors Myna Wallin and Halli Villegas have done a fine job selecting a cross-section of Canuck scribes — from dark fiction stalwarts and *RM* alumni Gemma Files and Paul A. Sawyer to best-selling poet Bruce Meyer.

Like most general anthologies, this one showcases a variety of settings, though most are firmly rooted in the present. The moods range from somber to light and whimsical, with the most pleasant surprise being some very fine vignettes ("Hair Wreath" by Villegas and J.Y.T. Kennedy's "The Fatality Sign" to name but two) and even sonnet-like horror poetry. Horror poetry is ubiquitous, but *good* horror poetry is as rare as pristine crystal. Catherine Graham's brief "Mistrust" tackles ennui, chemo, reticence to make the late M.R. James smile (and scream).

There are a few duds, though. Too many of the authors focus on occasionally banal tales of haunted technology (PCs, Blackberries, etc.) and build their stories around twist endings — a technique that only works when the climax is a surprise and not glaringly apparent from the opening paragraph.

All in all, *In the Dark* offers a lot of good writing, mixed with some truly exceptional writing, and while it may not breach any new literary frontiers, it does succeed in satisfying our seemingly insatiable appetite for a good ghost story.

Richard Gavin

the term "volume two" exists. In the meantime, to borrow from Barker's own flagship villain, Piccirilli and his crew have such sights to show you!

John W. Bowen

Lisey's Story

Stephen King

Scribner



Stephen King is over and done, with his best work long behind him. Last year's *Cell* was *The Stand* with rage-afflicted zombies. His *Dark Tower* toppled. His decline has even infected Peter Straub, their *Black House* a lacklustre return to the world of the *The Talisman*. Or so says conventional wisdom; but with King's latest offering, *Lisey's Story*, naysayers may yet find themselves surprised. The novel is easily his most moving in years, and one that ranks alongside *The Body* and *Bag of Bones* in its portrayal of love and loss.

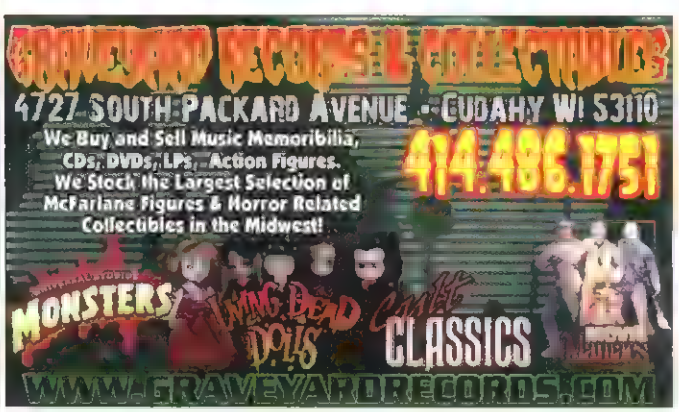
Lisey Landon, the tale's titular heroine, is still reeling from the death of her famous author husband, Scott, two years earlier. As she finally sets about putting his affairs in order, she receives what seems to be just another crank call from one of her late husband's many fans. But Jim Dooley is genuinely deranged and willing to go to extremes to access Scott's trove of unpublished work, eventually subjecting Lisey to both psychological and physical torture. Only by drawing from her memories and a series of unexplainable events from their years of marriage, can she fight this darkness that threatens to destroy her.

Given King's command of character, it's disappointing that this portrait of a grieving widow must run afoul of the Conventional Horror Plot, in this case The Mad Stalker, particularly since *Lisey's Story* doesn't need a boogeyman. The book's greatest asset, after all, is its protagonist, a woman who makes mistakes, succumbs to her failures and ultimately finds the strength to triumph over them. The fact that we will all inevitably face such loss only adds to the power of the novel.

Despite certain similarities to *Misery* (particularly Number One Fan Annie Wilkes) and a resolution that dips perilously close to the "alternate realities" of *Rose Madder* and the epic *Dark Tower* series, *Lisey's Story* ranks as one of King's best tales of devotion, memory and the darkness that lurks at the edges of our seemingly normal lives. Clearly he's not done with us yet, and if *Lisey's Story* is any indication, that's a good thing.

Brad Abraham





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WARNING! TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

OTTAWA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH HOSTEL ONTARIO, CANADA

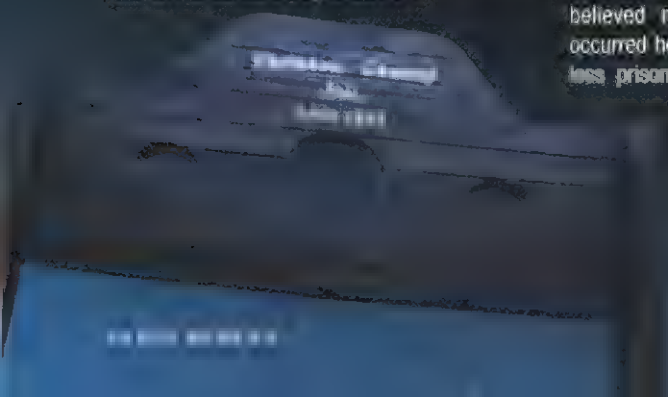
BY BRIAN SINGLETON



Even after Eli Roth converted a leisurely backpacking destination into a house of chainsaw-wielding and blowtorch disfigurement, the world's youth hostels remain a popular alternative for weary travellers. The Ottawa International Youth Hostel in Canada's capital offers a little of both. Since 1973, guests at this unique destination have enjoyed good food, friendly service and comfortable accommodations... behind bars.

Prior to its hostel years, this building was home to the most violent prison in Canada, the Carleton County Gaol. Connected by an underground tunnel to the Ottawa Court House, the jail was built in 1862. This foreboding stone dungeon was home to 150 inmates, guards, and an infamous gallows, where death row prisoners would be publicly executed. Men, women and even children were incarcerated here; some for murder, some for mental illness (a crime in those days) and some for nothing more than public intoxication.

The hostel features eight floors: the basement, the main registration area and six floors of prison cells converted into bedrooms. Guests get to spend the night in jail, but with many added comforts like clean washrooms, hot showers, a spacious lounge, dining area and a fully functional kitchen with daily breakfast and dinner specials that former inmates only dreamed of.



In the prison days, the cells were much smaller, often with barely enough room to move. But, even those cells were luxury suites compared to the ground floor solitary confinement. In each of those six rooms, a pair of iron cuffs are bolted to the cold concrete floor. Here, an unfortunate prisoner would be stripped naked and chained down in a pitch-black, vermin-infested hellhole for days, sometimes weeks. Unlike the refurbished guest floors, the solitary cells have remained untouched and still appear just as they did at the time, ironically, now directly adjacent to the hostel's laundry facilities.

The eighth floor is a different story; this is death row. Here, the prison's own Green Mile leads you down a long narrow corridor, past the lonely cells of the damned, the ominous red door of the executioner's office and finally down the back staircase to the infamous gallows. In a tiny room, behind heavy black bars, a thick rope is suspended from the ceiling, above a trap door in the floor. Inmates would be strung up and dropped to their deaths. The rope would then lower their lifeless bodies into the back courtyard to be witnessed by hundreds, sometimes thousands, of spectators. Despite its capabilities, only three official hangings ever took place in the building. The final execution on March 27, 1946, saw 24-year-old Eugene Lamment put to death for the murder of a policeman. It was also the last public hanging in Canada.

At the top of the gallows staircase, a long wooden beam stretches across the wall. It is believed many illegal hangings of inmates occurred here at the hands of corrupt and ruthless prison guards. As further evidence, deep grooves of rope can still be seen in the middle of the beam. It's speculated that after an inmate had died, the rope would be cut, dropping the body through the centre of the staircase and sending it crashing to the floor eight levels below. Even now, the floorboards at the bottom of these stairs are soft and broken, possibly from the impact of falling bodies. Some of these victims are said to be buried in the prison courtyard, including one inmate whose documented case revealed that he had been beaten to death by a guard at the base of the staircase, where his screams for help could not be heard. Of course, with such a turbulent history plaguing these walls, it's no surprise that Ottawa's Youth Hostel enjoys another notorious distinction as one of the most haunted public buildings in Canada.

Much of the hostel's fame has been garnered from its ghostly reputation. Since its inception, visitors have reported countless unexplained events which lend themselves to the existence of a paranormal presence. Present-day staff have experienced a variety of phenomena including disappearing objects, disembodied footsteps and the sounds of moving furniture in empty rooms above the top floor. Once, on a routine sweep of the eighth floor, a lone employee had the heavy wooden door to Death Row slam shut behind her. Despite a desperate struggle, the door appeared locked, as if being held shut by an unseen force. Eventually, it opened of its own accord and the terrified employee fled. Strangely enough, other than the main entrance and the former executioner's office, no door in the hostel has a lock.

Sometimes, the spirits can even get a little too close for comfort, as one assistant manager discovered after apparently being slapped in the face by an unseen hand while sitting with co-workers in the main office. Although very rare, there have even been reports of actual apparitions. A guest once witnessed a naked woman drying herself in the washroom on the fourth floor late one evening. When questioned, she turned to the guest only to reveal a blank, featureless face. This is the same floor where all female prisoners used to be incarcerated.

The hostel has been showcased on numerous television programs including *Creepy Canada* and various local news broadcasts. The hauntings have also been documented by Canadian authors

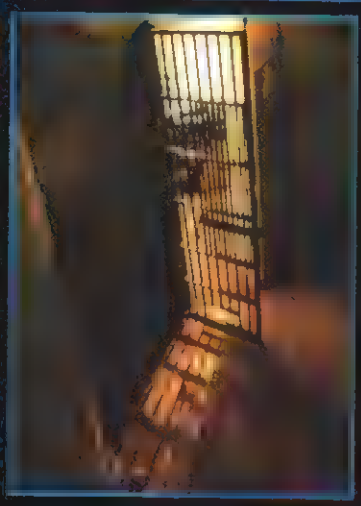
Photos by Brian Singleton

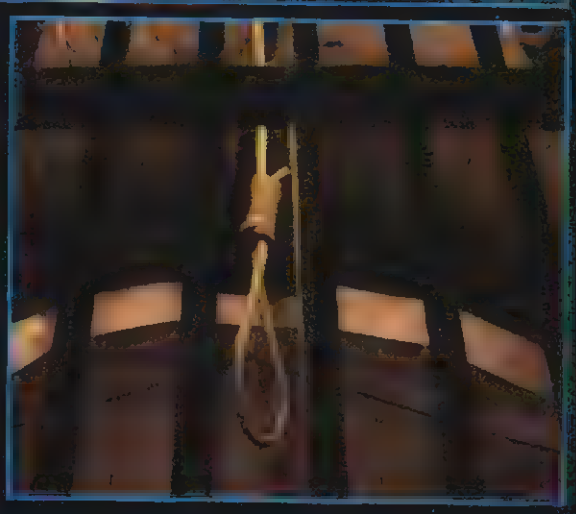
such as "Master Gatherer," John Robert [illegible] and ghost enthusiast Terry Boyle (*Haunted Ontario*). Paranormal research groups nationwide have conducted investigations here and various psychic mediums have attested to the presence of angry spirits still imprisoned long after death. Various experts agree that a high concentration of negative paranormal energy resonates from behind the red door of the former executioner's office on death row, an appropriate target since this would no doubt be the most hated room in the jail. On several occasions, both staff and guests are said to have heard ghostly conversations between two men coming from behind this locked door. The room has been empty for 30 years and no one has access.

As someone who has spent many nights at the Ottawa International Youth Hostel, I have had my own experiences on this floor. In 2001, while making a short documentary on the hauntings, a video camera placed outside the final death row holding cell captured the faint sound of a man screaming in pain. The ghostly voice shouted, "Help me! Oh God, help me!" These detached, directionless screams were heard by several crew members, yet there was supposedly no one else on the floor. Whether you "believe in ghosts" or not, the vast collection of paranormal accounts gathered over the hostel's 35-year history is undeniable.

If you ask the hostel staff, much of the ghostly goings-on are often attributed to possibly the most restless spirit in Carleton County, Patrick James Whelan. At the age of 29, Whelan was accused of the April 7, 1868 assassintion of Canadian journalist and Father of Confederation, Thomas D'Arcy McGee. McGee's death was the only federal political assassination in Canadian history. Whelan proclaimed his innocence to the grave and gained many supporters, including the prison guard who watched his cell during Whelan's final days. A record 5000 people attended his public execution on February 11, 1869. A newspaper article of Whelan's story marks the entrance to his cell on death row. The actual pistol that killed McGee can even be seen at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, a short drive from the hostel.







Haunted Hostel: *(clockwise) Prison cells converted to bedrooms, the gallows at death row and a solitary confinement room. Opposite: The Ottawa Youth Hostel exterior and the haunting outdoor stocks of the Carleton County Gaol.*

As far as Whelan's ghost goes, a tall male figure fitting his description has been seen in the reflection of the windows on death row by several young guests on the nightly Ghosts in the Gaols tour; a trip through the jail focusing exclusively on the location's spirited spectres, including Patrick James Whelan. It seems only fitting that this could be the spirit of Whelan himself, tagging along to hear his own tall tales night after night. The Hostel also hosts a daily Crime and Punishment tour where guests can enjoy a fascinating lecture on the building's bloody past while walking the hallowed halls and gloomy grounds first-hand.

So, whether you're a tired traveller, a curious crime buff or a gutsy ghost hunter, The Ottawa International Youth Hostel is a world famous one-of-a-kind overnight experience.

The Ottawa International Youth Hostel is located at 75 Nicholas Street, Ottawa, Ontario. Dorms, with communal baths, are $31.50 (including taxes) per night, with non-lockout or curfew. For more information, contact the hostel directly at 613-235-2595.







THE GORE-MET MENU

THE GORE-MET CHEWS OVER GERMANY'S TRUE CRIME-INSPIRED MOVIE *CANNIBAL*



CANNIBAL

Starring Carsten Frank and Victor Brandl
Written and directed by Marian Dora
Unearthed Films

One of the most notorious crimes of the new millennium was committed by Armin Meiwes, the mild-mannered German computer tech who in 2001 successfully trolled the internet for a "well-built 18 to 30-year-old to be slaughtered" in order to satisfy a childhood sexual fantasy.

As revealed in Meiwes' sensational 2003 trial, he first severed the penis of 43-year-old Bernd-Jurgen Brandes and cooked it for the two of them to eat. Later, he stabbed Brandes in the neck, dismembered him, and stored away some 65 kilograms of flesh in a deep freezer. The outcome of the trial was inevitable: Meiwes had videotaped the killing and readily confessed. After an extensive psychiatric evaluation, the respectful cannibal was tried, convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to eight-and-a-half years. The case raised ethical questions. Cannibalism was not a crime in Germany, and the so-called victim was an active participant. Nevertheless, the conviction was overturned and Meiwes was retried, found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in 2006. These are the basic facts as reported in the international media – the Devil is in the details.



Recalling Ed Gein, the necrophile who inspired *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Meiwes lived in a rambling, 200-year-old country manor he had shared with his domineering mother, who reportedly accompanied him both on drills and field exercises during a stint in the army. After her death, Meiwes allegedly made a shrine of her bedroom and would wear her clothes. He also constructed a torture room with a meat hook hanging from the ceiling.

Meiwes received hundreds of replies to his chatroom queries and Usenet postings, and had a number of fruitless encounters before hooking up with Brandes, who had a fantasy in which he was castrated and hung. He urged Meiwes to bite off his dick. When Meiwes couldn't chomp through it, he resorted to using two knives to cut it off. The first was apparently too dull.

Meiwes was apprehended when an Austrian student alerted authorities to advertisements for a second victim. Police estimated he had consumed 20 kilograms of Brandes' flesh, which Meiwes disclosed he had eaten with Brussels sprouts and South African wine. He had also attempted to make flour out of Brandes' bones.

During a psychiatric evaluation, Meiwes reportedly said his fantasy was bolstered by watching horror movies.

This brings us to *Cannibal*, the first of three feature films inspired by Meiwes' story to surface on DVD. One of those, *Butterfly: A Grimm Love Story*, starring Thomas Kretschmann (*The Stendhal Syndrome*) and Keri Russell (*Felicity* TV series), was banned in Germany after Meiwes sued to suppress its release there on the grounds it infringed on his "personality rights." (The film has a limited theatrical release this month in North America.) Subsequently, the unnamed principal characters in *Cannibal* are known only as "The Man" and "The Flesh," and the DVD packaging makes no mention of Meiwes.

After an opening credit sequence in which a woman reads from *Hansel und Gretel* while a male hand fondles true crime books, the first half of the film plays as a twisted gay love story. Man (Carsten Frank, above) meets Flesh (Victor Brandl); they drink tea, have a round of nude lawn bowling and fuck all night before the film takes a turn into the darkest depths of human depravity. The latter half features the Flesh's ultimate demise played out in excruciating detail in the most horrific locale since *TCM*.

As unrelentingly grim as the subject matter is, this is an astoundingly beautiful art house exploitation film, and as lazy as the comparison may seem, much in the vein of Jörg Buttgereit's *Schramm*. It is non-judgmental and sensitive in its portrayal of the principal characters, yet true to the documented facts of the case and gruesomely realistic. The Man is by no means a monster, at times he is as horrified as the audience is sure to be, nor is The Flesh a freak, even as he berates The Man for being weak while sporting a half-chewed half-hard-on. They are simply two lonely men caught in an inexorable escalation of fantasy and lust.

The Unearthed Films disc features an impressive anamorphic print in the original 1.85:1 aspect ratio. Extras are comprised of seven trailers for other Unearthed titles. This one's not for the weak.

"*Star Wars* meets the *Vampires in Moscow* ... it bursts with a sick, carnivorous glee in its fiendish games." –THE NEW YORK TIMES



"*Night Watch* is an epic of extraordinary power."
–QUENTIN TARANTINO

Watch for *The Twilight Watch* (book 3, coming in July)
and *The Last Watch* (book 4, coming January 2008)

Visit www.randomhouse.ca to read excerpts

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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY CHRIS ALEXANDER, DAVE ALEXANDER, BRETT BAKKER, RODRIGO GUDIÑO, MARK R. HASAN AND AARON VON LUPTON



UNA VERGINE TRA I MORTI VIVENTI

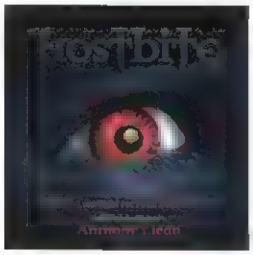
Soundtrack

Bruno Nicolai

DIGITMOVIES

The third volume in DigitMovie's ongoing Jess Franco/Bruno Nicolai tribute further advances Nicolai's stature as one of Italy's most talented film composers. In addition, one gets the impression that with each CD release, both Nicolai and Ennio Morricone fed off each other's interest in experimental concepts. On *Vergine*, there's a familiar clash of disciplines and idioms – atonal, rock, samba, jazz, and all-out weirdness with fuzzy electric guitar and tinkling piano – although one could argue that blending these diverse elements was the only way to score this wacky erotic thriller. The iconic Edda Dell'Orso contributes some background vocals to the mono recordings, ably moving between tracks of easy listening pap and ethereal mystique. Even if you're not a fan of Franco's films, DigitMovies is proving that Bruno Nicolai is a name you can bet on for craftsmanship and a groovy beat.

MRH ★★★★1/2



FROSTBITE

Soundtrack

Anthony Lledo

MOVIESCORE MEDIA

If ever there was a time to work "blood chilling" into a soundtrack review, this would be it: the snowy Swedish vampire movie *Frostbite*. Also available for download directly from the label, the 32-minute score is one of the most stirring horror soundtracks in recent years. Written for a large orchestra, Anthony Lledo's music doesn't have a lengthy, melodic theme, but the composer and his skilled ochestrators derive some superb action and suspense cues from a central six-note passage, with many discreet, elegant nuances embellishing already polished cues. A buoyant "The Vampire" is coloured with intersecting, spiralling passes from grouped instruments, while more sombre moods are conveyed through low, brassy tonalities, recalling Wojciech (*The Ninth Gate*) Kilar's more idiosyncratic style. The short bonus trailer music, with a protracted Hans Zimmer-style finale, closes the album. *Frostbite* is a little gem from a newcomer who's managed to inject classy romanticism into some revisionist blood-sucking. **MRH** ★★★★1/2



TROLL

Soundtrack

Richard Band

INTRADA SIGNATURE EDITIONS

File this under scores you didn't think would be reissued. Composed after he did *Re-Animator*, *Troll* (1995) is Richard Band's minor, tongue-in-cheek score centred around an infectious rhythm and some loony Latin incantations sung by a male chorus in a weirdly anachronistic, contemporary style. Film music fans will easily recognize the scores and cues Band has appropriated for this soundtrack – pieces from Jerry Goldsmith's *Poltergeist* and *Outland* pop up in the fifth and final suite – but when his variations work, they come off as cheeky filmic nods in what was always a throwaway B-movie. Heavy synth percussion coupled with a frenetic male and female chorus break the score's otherwise dominant orchestral tone, and the film's cartoon quality is furthered by some quirky theme variations and jolts of vintage electronica. While not an expanded album, Intrada's limited edition CD retains the LP's bass-friendly acoustic, and improves upon the original album's crappy vinyl stock. **MRH** ★★★



THE DEADCATS

Psychobilly

Feline 500

FLYING SAUCER RECORDS

Canadian psychobilly band The Deadcats drop this latest batch of sick songs from the backwoods with a sound ranging from raunchy ("Peggy Suicide") to smooth ("Fixin' for a Vixen"). The lyrical content for the most part is fun and campy, with tunes like "Mummified Baby," "Vampire Cats" and the Cramps-esque "Frank-n-Stein Shuffle," while some other less horrorcentric covers are executed with the band's undead 'n' dirty trademark sound (Link Wray's "Rumble," as well as Art Bergmann's early Canadian punk classic "Hawaii"). If you're already a fan or like your psychobilly to have that kitschy horror vibe, then this album won't find itself covered in cobwebs in your collection. But, if it's harder sounding, more polished psycho riffs you're after, you might not want to cross this cat's path. **BB** ★★



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LIFEFORCE

Soundtrack

Henry Mancini and Michael Kamen

BSX RECORDS



For years, this critic has been raving about the minimalist experimental music that composer Michael Kamen (*Brazil*) added to the US re-edit of Tobe Hooper's brilliant galactic, erotic vampire epic *Lifeforce*. That's not to say that Henry (*Pink Panther*) Mancini's original score wasn't fine and grandiose – it was – but there is something so skin-tightening about Kamen's electronic, symphonic decay that fits the oddness of the film so damn well. BSX Records' yummy new two-disc limited edition (only 3000 units issued) contains both scores in their entirety, plus scads of unused cues. If you're a fan of the film, this thing is reason enough to die happy. **CA** ★★★★½

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RAMMSTEIN **Metal/Industrial**

Volkerball Special Edition

UNIVERSAL



Germany's prime "tanz metal" export take its gospel of dystopia to the despondent youth of the world, here represented by mostly black-clad audiences in France, England, Japan and Russia. This impressive three-disc (one CD, two DVDs) Special Edition live release spans the band's thirteen-year career, showcasing their unique brand of metal-industrial, that sounds likes it's ripping its way through living flesh – appropriate, given that Rammstein took its name from a 1988 air-show disaster.

All is as it should be on the live CD, with the band dutifully machine-gunning its way through a full metal jacket of hits, including "Links 2 3 4," "Keine Lust," "Feuer Frei!," "Mein Teil," "Amerika," "Benzin" and, of course, "Du Hast," to which they owe much of their North American success.

Not surprisingly, the older tracks – such as "Sehnsucht" and "Asche Zu Asche" – survive the best. The live experience is not kind to vocalist Till Lindemann, who is often drowned out by the instruments, even on ballads like "Ohne Dich" and "Los" – where his cavernous growl loses some of its authority. Nevertheless, the band gets points for including two DVDs, one of which contains the entire visual footage of the concerts, and the other features a tour documentary (*Anakonda Im Netz*) and a second documentary on the making of the album *Reise, Reise*.

Of course, those who've been smitten by Rammstein's violent hybrid of muscled melody and Gothic melancholia will need little convincing to land this package: garbed in proto-military outfits and smeared with grime, the band turn their stage show into a nightmare opera of blitzkrieg pyrotechnics and choreographed lechery. A display dear to our own dark hearts. **RG** ☠☠☠☠☠

Cash and Waylon Jennings, it's no surprise Bourbon Crow plays booze-soaked love letters to outlaw country. What *is* a surprise is that it's the latest side project from glam/horror rocker Wednesday 13 – best known as the singer for the Murderdolls. As the album title makes very clear, the focus here is booze, a theme that gets beaten around with some amount of humour on tracks such as "Alcohol Express," "Drink 'Til You Ain't Ugly" and the in-case-you-didn't-get-it finale "Alcohol is Awesome." Sure, there are a few murder ballads – "A Bed in the Desert," "Dead Body," "Bolts in this Redneck" – but for the most part it's footloose and horror-free (e.g. "Suck My Dixie"). That's not to say it ain't fun and catchy, but if you can't muster a collection of duster ballads that aspire to anything other than whiskey worship, you're probably more lark than crow. **DA** ☠☠☠



THE LURKING CORPSES **Punk/Metal**

Lust For Blood

DARK HORIZON

Okay, now *this* is different. The Lurking Corpses debut *23 Tales of Terror* (*RM#41*) was a fairly typical crossover of old school thrash and hardcore, but on *Lust for Blood* (featuring an almost entirely new lineup) the band actually manages to make brutal death metal and new school horror-punk coexist in the same song. Though they aren't necessarily the best at either genre, you have to admire a band that can go soundwise from Mercyful Fate to The Independents without cracking a smile. Not only do they cover multiple musical styles, but their titular lust has them covering horror from all angles, from nasty gore ("Nun Vomit") and B-monsters ("Werewolf Queen") to a stoner rock anthem about evil hippies ("Witchcult '77"). With maniacs like this on the loose, horror rock's future is in safe hands. **AVL** ☠☠☠☠



MAKEUP AND VANITY SET **Electronica**

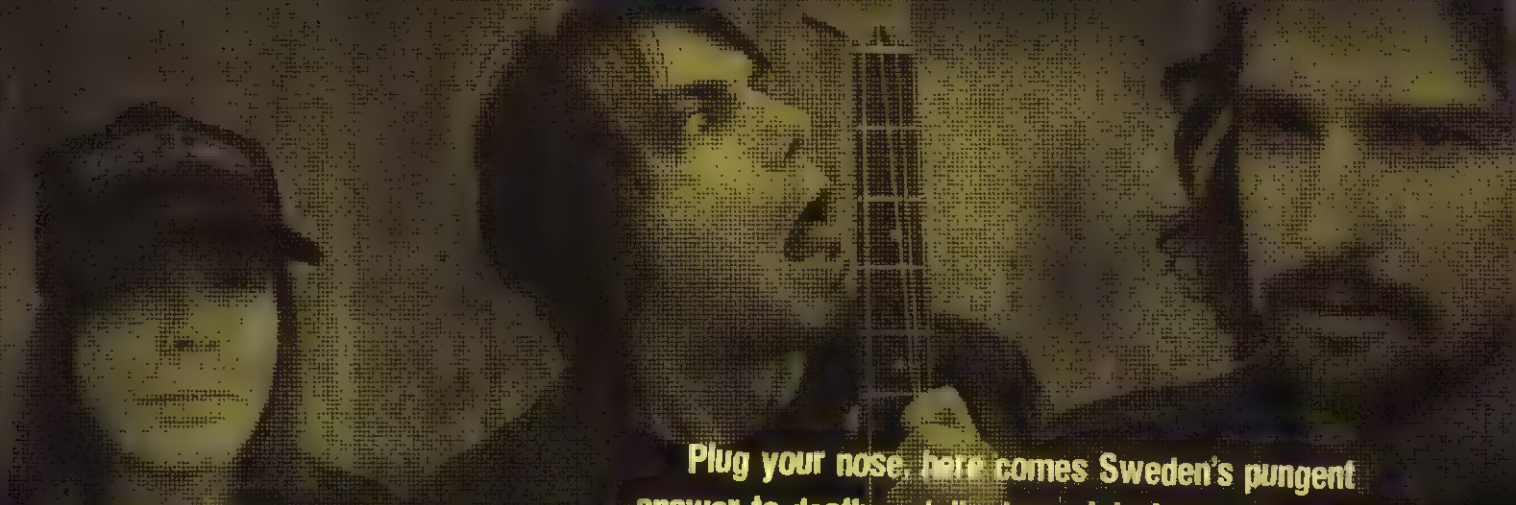
Charles Park

SOUNDMACHINE

The liner notes on *Charles Park* give thanks to John Carpenter and Dario Argento, and the influence that these two genre masters have on Makeup and Vanity Set's music is undeniable. Recorded with synthesizers and tape decks "at night," the album drips with the dark, synthy sounds and creepy beats of '80s Italian and American horror, and could easily serve as a soundtrack replacement to *Phenomena*, *Fright Night* or even a *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequel. Sadly, the artist's creative juices run dry about three quarters of the way through, but there's still more than enough deliciously dark material here to satisfy your cravings for a classic gore score. Tailor-made for those nights when the dance floor drips with blood. **AVL** ☠☠☠☠







Plug your nose, here comes Sweden's pungent answer to death metal's doom 'n' gloom status quo.

The Stench of Death Metal

BY KEITH CARMAN

When horror-based death metal first reared its ugly head some two decades ago, a sense of humour was as mandatory as a studded belt and split ends. Bands such as Autopsy, Death and Cannibal Corpse were having a laugh while beating eardrums senseless with guttural growling, hyper drumming and intentionally over-the-top songs, such as CC's controversial "Fucked with a Knife."

Over the years, interest was increasingly placed on image over content. The average death metaller's desire to come across as evil, creepy or just plain disgusting has dramatically lowered the ratio of chuckles to gross-outs, and the scene retains little of its original essence.

Formed with the intention of lightening things up a little bit, Sweden's Death Breath consists of scene veterans Nicke Andersson (Entombed/Nihilist/Hellacopters), Robert Pehrsson, Jorgen Sandstrom (Grave) and Scott Carlson (Repulsion). The group's debut effort, *Stinking up the Night* (Relapse), does just that with a collection of tunes reminiscent of death metal's heyday. Thundering away at breakneck speed, "Chopping Spree," "Heading for Decapitation," "Flabby Little Things From Beyond" and "Coffins of the Unembalmed Dead" find Death Breath as amusing as they are gruesome.

"I left [Entombed] when I found things getting a bit… pretentious," admits Andersson. "The music had lost the entertaining qualities. When we started Death Breath, we just wanted to write great death metal [and] have fun with it. It doesn't come across as the most serious Devil-worshipping kind of stuff. Music is supposed to be entertainment. … [Our] lyrics are about zombies, medieval decapitation, psychopaths and Satan. What else do you need?"

To that end, Andersson keeps things simple, focusing his songwriting on the aforementioned list of atrocities, evil and monsters, including Cthulhu (immortalized on "Cthulhu Fhtagn!"). Strangely, he even finds lyrical inspiration in the "hilarity" of Lovecraft.



"I just find a good title or subject that's kind of funny but a bit twisted," he notes. "Or I read an H.P. Lovecraft novel and I get inspired. I think he's hilarious [although] people over analyze him. I like the dark vibe but at the same time, you don't really get scared by Lovecraft. You think it's cool [and] that's the point: the monsters are cool. That's what this music was [originally] about … it's all just entertainment, better than any slasher movie."

Zombies also get their fair share of face time in the form of the band's undead mascot – the blank-eyed brain-eater who also stars in the video for "Death Breath" (see it at myspace.com /deathbreathdeathmetal). A humorous tribute to *Night of the Living Dead*, the black and white vid has the zombie chasing a nubile young woman through a forest, trying to get her with its, well, death breath.

Andersson is quick to point out, though, that Death Breath is not a novelty band. Brutal but intricate, *Stinking up the Night* pulls heavily from serious horror soundtracks, particularly zombie films, which are, not surprisingly, Andersson's favourite.

"When I think of zombie movies, I think of death metal," he explains. "[The cinematic genre] works with the music: the mood, the claustrophobia. To me, death metal is heavy metal with the scales of horror movie soundtracks. Metal lifts its structure from the classical music of horror movies. I can watch a horror movie and bits and pieces of the soundtrack transfer into great riffs. [Death metal] is Judas Priest mixed with horror movies – played really fast. I think that applies to any death metal band, even if they don't know it."

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS | PLAYABILITY | SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



MMM...BRAINS!

Dice Game

Twilight Creations Inc.

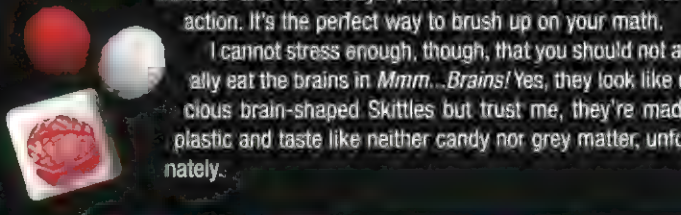
Sick and tired of hobbling through the mall, and with nothing left to eat in the graveyard, you and your undead pals have just hit the zombie mothertode after stumbling onto a stash of 50 fresh, succulent brains. Now you've got to fight each other to see who gets to eat them all.

Utilizing very simple rules, players take turns rolling five colour-coded dice to determine how many brains they get to scoop from the stash. After all of them have been divvied up, it's time to get really greedy.

This is where the game changes, as rolls of the dice now indicate how many meals you're allowed to either take from or have to give away to other players. As soon as opponents lose all of their brains, they're out. Play continues as the remaining ghouls grab and swap the grey matter until one player has all 50 brains.

Three to five fiends battle it out in games that usually last about twenty minutes and are always packed with fun, fast and furious action. It's the perfect way to brush up on your math.

I cannot stress enough, though, that you should not actually eat the brains in *Mmm...Brains!* Yes, they look like delicious brain-shaped Skittles but trust me, they're made of plastic and taste like neither candy nor grey matter, unfortunately.





A FEAST TO DIE FOR/LAST CALL

RPG

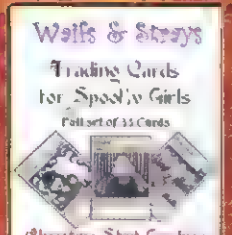
Specialty Board Games Inc.

The interactive murder-mystery role-playing game has become a popular pastime in recent years, resulting in many interesting and intricate titles that pit diverse groups of characters against each other in challenging whodunits.

A Feast to Die For and *Last Call* were both [illegible] Haines, whose [illegible] per for 34 years and spawned 27 [illegible].

Each game begins with [illegible] roles of characters who interact with [illegible] the murderer is by using information [illegible] and clues that are uncovered as the game progresses.

The games come with everything you'll need to host [illegible] mystery party, including [illegible] optional dinner [illegible]



Courtesy of Toronto's creepy Christine Stait-Gardner, *Waifs and Strays* is a trading card game for spooky kids which explores the shadowy lives of sixteen orphaned girls investigating a number of very tragic deaths.

Using a set of charmingly illustrated cards, players must recover lost objects, all the while battling "evil" puppets — such as Heretic, who [illegible] victims' pant legs together. Luckily, players can also use magic to undo the dastard[illegible]

[illegible] dead pet spider.

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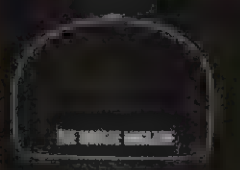


BAGS!

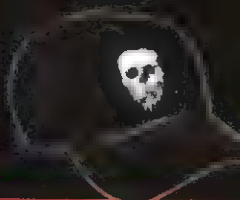
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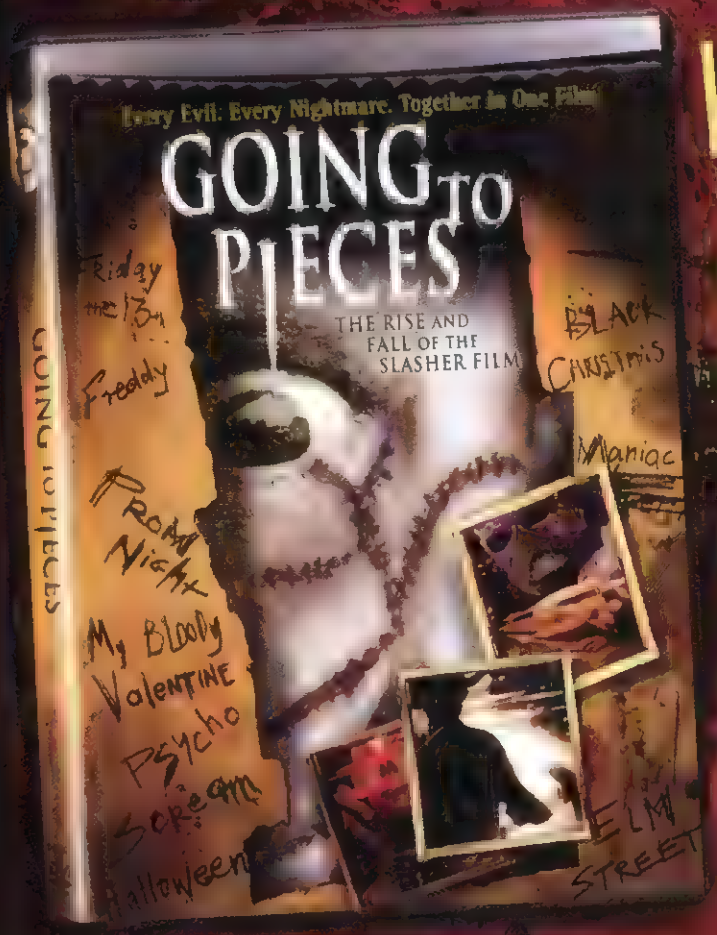
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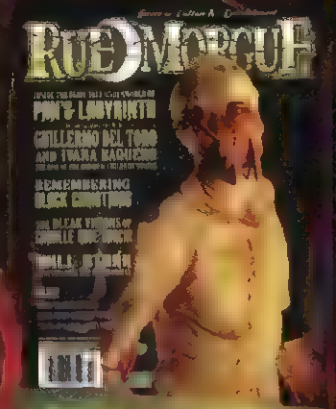
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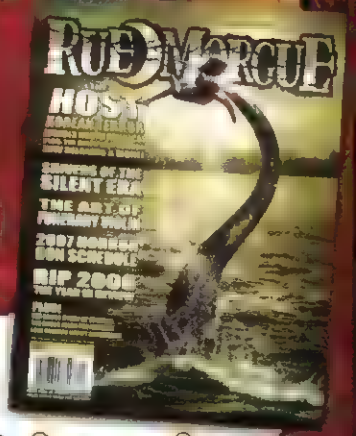


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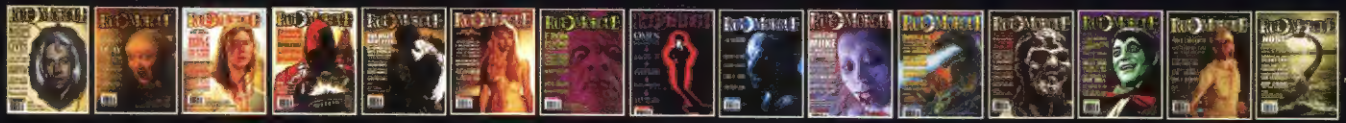
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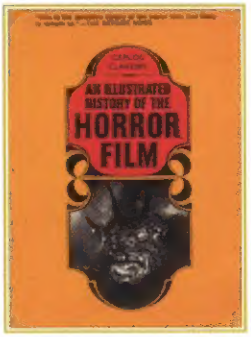
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CARLOS CLARENS

USA – 1967

It is easy to forget that until the late '60s, reading an English-language historical analysis of the genre was nearly impossible and mostly limited to a few – usually hostile – articles in film journals. Though some volumes were published in France in the late '50s on what they call Le Fantastique (fantasy film), genre fans would have to wait until the 1967 publication of Carlos Clarens' *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* and Ivan Butler's *The Horror Film* for the very first English tomes on the subject.

Both books are now considered groundbreakers, but Clarens' work is more exhaustive and incisive than Butler's. More importantly, *An Illustrated History* is the kind of effort we have all come to appreciate: a serious history of the horror film by a fan. With a love that rivals that of Forrest J. Ackerman, Clarens deftly defended the genre to elitist film critics and historians of the time.

The book's coverage begins with the silent classics, moving to the sound era, then to the golden age of the 1940s, the invasion films of the 1950s, and finally to the revolutionary Hammer movies and the emerging Italian cinema of the same period. In it, Clarens powerfully draws the reader's attention to the simple beauty of the early horror film. Writing about the often maligned *Freaks* (1932) by Tod Browning, he argues that it "contains the most accomplished scenes" of the director's career, brimming with "Goyaesque vitality."

He also devotes a full chapter to Carl Theodor Dreyer's quiet, dread-filled *Vampyr* (1932), which he champions as a "pillar of the genre." And perhaps most daringly, the movie historian does not shy away from discussing the lurid content of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) – which was reviled by British film critics as trashy perversion upon its release – appreciatively calling it "one of the few truly Sadian films." Additionally, Clarens introduced readers to then little-known Mexican horror films, such as Fernando Méndez's *El Vampiro* (1957, *RM#64*), a tradition that for him is marked by creative "vigor and self-conviction." It's this examination of Mexican cinema, which he describes positively compared to his negative evaluation of Italian horror from the same period, that reveals an unavoidable bias in the book.

In an attempt to defend the genre as a whole, Clarens consigns the gory and explicit Grand Guignol tradition to the low-end, elevating instead what he considers the more art house films of the unseen and shadowy, such as the work of Val Lewton, to whom the author devotes a full chapter. Inasmuch as Lewton-produced films are indeed worthy of lengthy analysis, Clarens uses them to define what he felt was at the high-end of the genre and to criticize the low end. Within this context, he throws disparaging remarks at the works of directors such as Mario Bava and Herschell Gordon Lewis. Though the bias is obviously a product of more conservative times, it's forgivable given the author's impassioned writing style.

An occasional contributor to the film journal *Cahier du cinéma*, Clarens was inspired by French film criticism, particularly "auteur theory" (the idea that a single film or body of work reveals the director's vision). As such, his treatment of the horror genre begins with the fin-de-siècle sideshow films of Georges Méliès and ends with Jean-Luc Godard's new wave sci-fi film *Alphaville* (1965). Clarens also adopted the broad definition of Le Fantastique used by French critics, by including the monster and sci-fi films of the 1950s, in a chapter aptly titled "Keep Watching the Skies" – a quote, of course, from *The Thing From Another World* (1951).

Clarens was a very literate horror buff, so it should come as no surprise that *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* has influenced countless genre aficionados and historians, including J. Hoberman (co-writer of *Midnight Movies*), who penned an introduction to the 1997 edition of Clarens's book, and the horror historian David J. Skal (*The Monster Show*). Moreover, horror film enthusiast and author Kim Newman (editor of the encyclopedic *BFI Companion to Horror*), wrote a pseudo-sequel entitled *Nightmare Movies: A Critical History of the Horror Film, 1968-1988*, which begins where Clarens had left off.

Looking back on the period in which the book was written, it's almost as if Clarens, who died of a heart attack in 1987 at the age of 56, sensed the radical shift that was about to occur. The following year's release of George Romero's cornerstone *Night of the Living Dead* would radically change horror cinema forever, and Clarens' book covers the fundamental films that helped pave the way for it with a kind of incisiveness even more palpable 40 years after its initial publication.

Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare



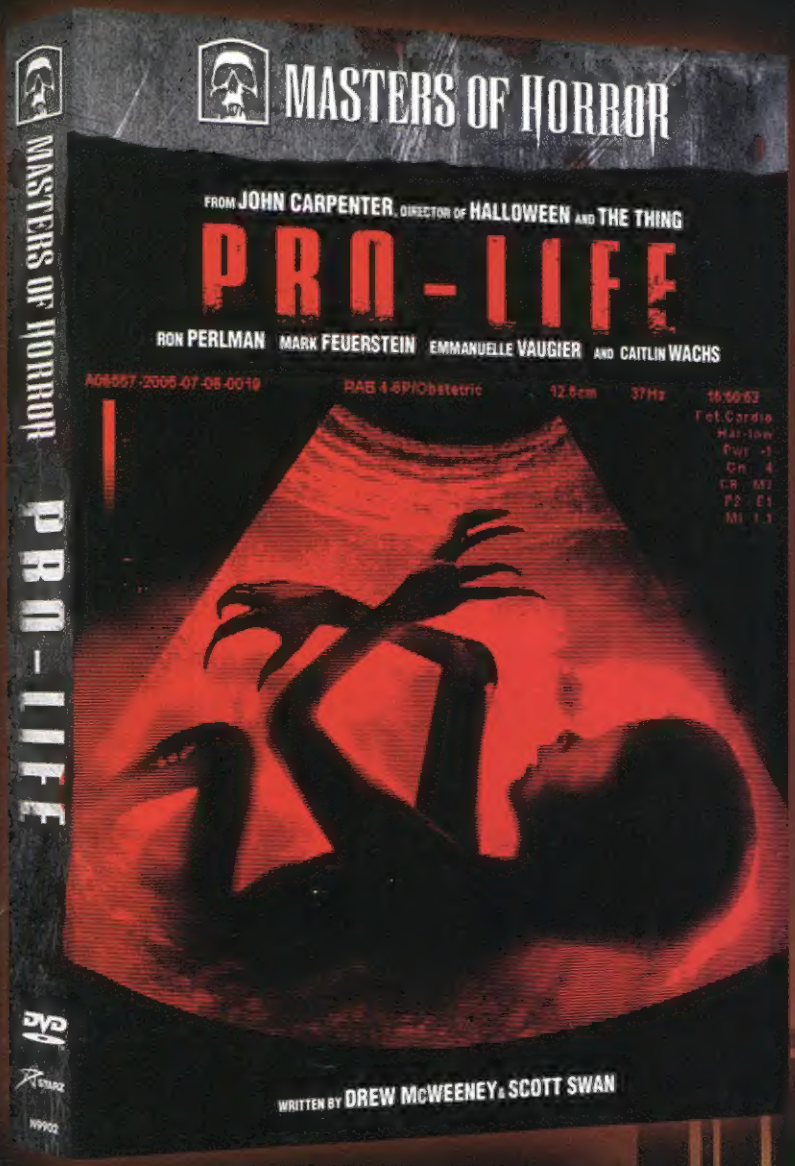
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